

HESTER
OF
PEPPER TREE
RANCH



FELICIA BUTTZ CLARK

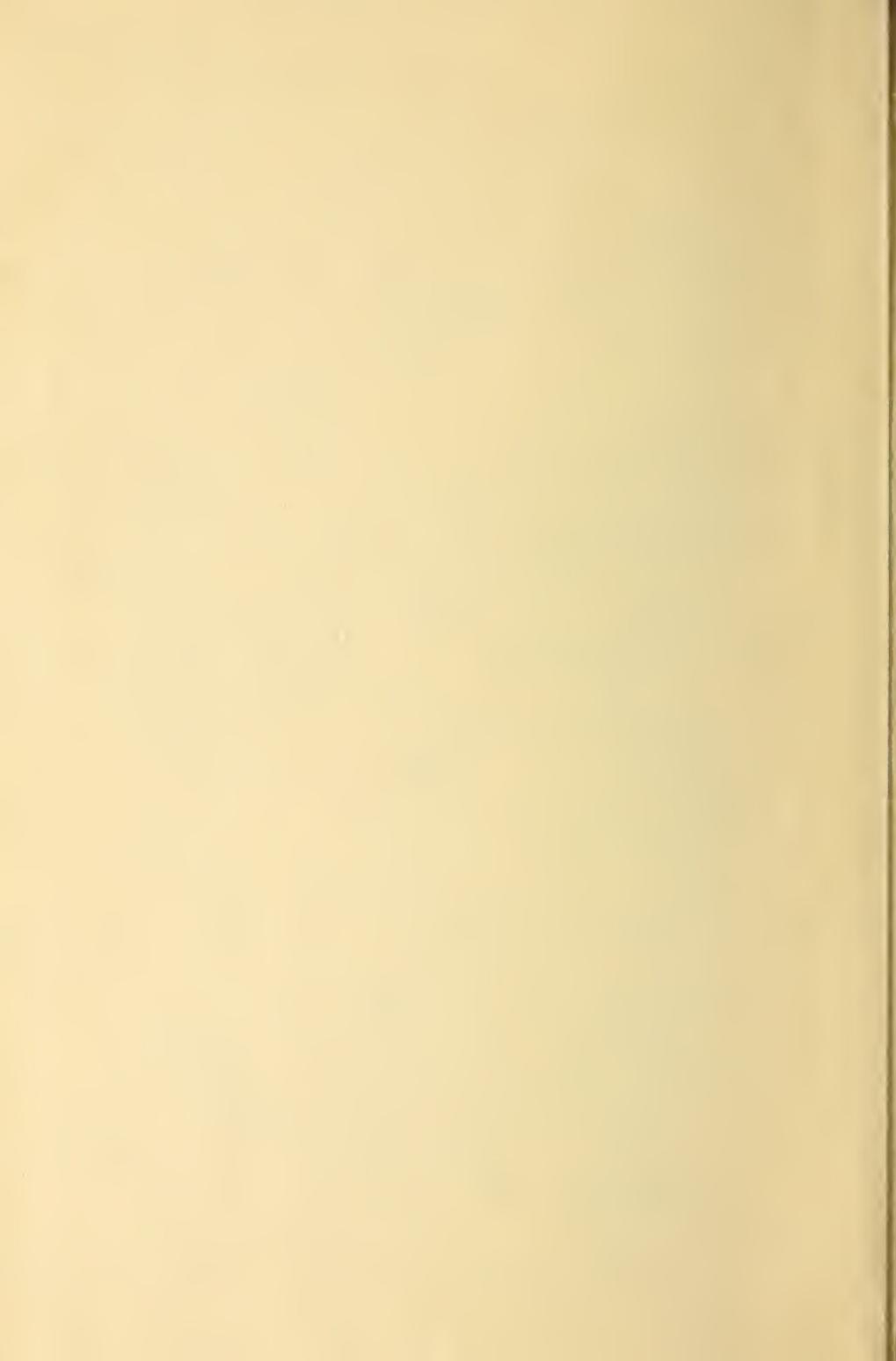
J. R. 1931 P&G

Beatrice
from Daddy & Mother

Xmas 1937

Cathy May Fisher

June 16



HESTER OF PEPPER TREE RANCH



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HESTER.

HESTER OF PEPPER TREE RANCH

By
FELICIA B. CLARK

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TIME : 1924—1928.

BACKGROUND

- I THE OLD BELL INN, VERMONT.
- II PEPPER TREE RANCH, NEW MEXICO.
- III EUWER MANOR, ENGLAND.

CHARACTERS

HESTER EUWER, *daughter of Major Hugh Euwer.*

LEONARD EUWER, *Owner of Pepper Tree Ranch.*

JOHN DODD, *Proprietor of Bell Inn, and*

JANE DODD, *his wife.*

JOHN (JACK) DODD, *their son, fifth in line.*

MADAME DUFOUR, *widow of a descendant of a noble French family.*

JACQUES DUFOUR, *Violinist and Aviator.*

HIRAM LAWRENCE, *prominent Banker in Burlington, Vermont.*

VIRGINIA and

GRAY, *his children.*

CONSTANCE ARNOLD, *Hester's room-mate at Smith College.*

PAUL FITZ-MAURICE, *her husband.*

THE HONOURABLE GEORGE BEETHAM, *distinguished Archaeologist
and Explorer.*

HOWARD EATON, *Landscape painter, and*

MARY, *his wife.*

THE SHERIFF *and His Assistant, JOSIAH.*

SPIRIT OF THE EAGLE, *a Pueblo Indian, called ' CHARLIE.'*

WONG, *Cook at Pepper Tree Ranch.*

TIM, PEDRO the Mexican, JOSE, the Half-breed, *Derelicts rescued
by Leonard Euwer.*

TO-DAY'S FEVER.

'And He said unto them, This kind can come out by nothing but by prayer and fasting.'

Mark ix. 29.

Hester of Pepper Tree Ranch

I

THE OLD BELL INN

IT stood on one of the mountains in Northern Vermont. From its small-paned windows could be seen rolling hills, billowing toward the horizon, green in summer; from November to April usually clothed in snow-white.

Hester vigorously rang the bell to call the men from adjacent fields, where they were mowing the grain, swinging scythes in unison. Hester was the waitress at Bell Inn; she enjoyed jingling the dinner bell.

Sauntering past her, going toward the basement door, came a young man whose head towered above the other reapers. He walked with the easy, free step of a trained athlete. As he went by his glance met Hester's, and a faint smile broadened his full-lipped mouth.

At the end of the wide hall of the Inn, through which Hester ran on her way to the kitchen, a window overlooked the orchard where trees were full of bright red apples, ripening in the warm August sunshine.

'They've come,' Hester said. 'I'll help dish up, Mrs. Dodd.'

'Father doesn't like to wait,' said the landlady. 'I don't see why you was so long ringing that bell, Hester.'

As there was no reply, only a deepening of colour in the girl's cheeks, a firmer pressure to her mouth, Mrs. Dodd silently passed her the food.

In the long, cool cellar a dozen men gathered at the tables.

It was pleasant here, away from the blinding glare of sunlight in the hay-fields.

'Come along, John,' called the proprietor of Bell Inn, already seated, glancing with some impatience at the stairs leading up to the kitchen.

The tall, fair young man sat down at his father's right.

There was the flutter of a blue dress on the stairway. Carrying a large platter piled high with roast pork and deeply-brownèd potatoes, Hester staggered slightly with its weight. Her slender arms were not yet accustomed to bearing heavy burdens.

Jack Dodd uneasily stirred. Before he could rise to help her she had safely deposited the platter and his father bowed his head. 'Our Father, for all Thy mercies to us, we give Thee heartfelt thanks. Grant Thy blessing upon this food provided for us, and may it strengthen us for Thy service. Amen.'

It was the first day of harvesting. Some of the men were new to Bell Inn and its customs. They sat upright, gazing at John Dodd with wonder, never having experienced this before. Others sheepishly grinned at each other, while John Dodd said Grace. He was hopelessly behind the times, this grin said plainly, but one must be patient with him. Always was sort of queer, him and his father before him. Gittin' old, too. Must be nigh on to fifty.

Hester brought dish after dish. John Dodd dealt bountifully with his reapers. While they were working in his fields, he and his son, young John, ate at the same table, shared the same food. Stewed tomatoes and steaming corn on the cob, home-made bread, butter churned on the place, pitchers full of creamy milk, preserves, pickles, berry pie and fragrant coffee; there was no lack at Bell Inn.

'Got a good cook,' said one of the men.

John Dodd heard this.

'My wife does the cooking.'

‘ ‘Nuff said.’ Behind his hand, the man—one of the strangers—whispered, ‘ I’ll stand prayers at the end o’ the meal ez well ez at the beginnin’ fer sech vittles.’

‘ That’s why he gits help so easy,’ was his neighbour’s response. ‘ The food an’ the pay. It’s always sure. There ain’t a straighter man in the hull state o’ Vermont than John Dodd, an’ ev’rybody knows they kin depend on his word.’

The first man ate his pie.

‘ Dreadful religious, ain’t he? I ain’t heard a Blessin’ sence my grandfather used to make ’em. Sort o’ gone out o’ style.’

‘ Sech religion as John Dodd hes ain’t never goin’ to hurt nobody. He’s white all through. Mebbe it’s the religion does it. I dunno. Ain’t much of it around these here days.’

‘ I hate to take the time to do it, John,’ the grey-haired man was saying, ‘ but I’ll have to go to the bank at Burlington this afternoon to get money to pay the men. They like to have cash, and I must see Lawrence about that mortgage on the French woman’s property.’

‘ You mean the Dufour place?’

‘ Yes. I’ve had five years of it now, and I’m tired. Dead loss, too. Since he died she hasn’t paid a cent of interest, and I’ve let it go by. Kind of sorry for her.’

‘ When is the mortgage due?’

John Dodd’s face brightened, it was pleasant to have a son to talk to. Besides, John ought to know about the business if he was going to settle down here, as he hoped he would. Civil engineering! That was what he had in his head now. All nonsense. There had always been a John Dodd at Bell Inn, ever since the first John, his great-great-grandfather, built it along the Post Road between Burlington and Boston. Please God, there always would be. He frowned slightly at the thought, for he wasn’t at all sure. Young folk puzzled him.

‘ It comes due in October this year. That’s what I want to consult Lawrence about. Seems as if I ought to give her some

sort of warning. Maybe she can raise the money for back interest. If she can, I won't foreclose. I hate to do it, anyway.'

'Yes,' agreed young John—Jack, his contemporaries called him.

His glance followed Hester's slim figure, moving between the tables. Her dress was blue—a straight, soft gown of some thin goods—and her arms were bare. When she answered some of the men's teasing remarks, she tossed her bobbed head and smiling, showed a row of perfect white teeth.

Jack wondered whether Hester would care to ride over to Stanton that night. Mary Pickford's 'His Best Girl' was being shown.

Pity Hester had to work so hard. Mother was kind of hard on her, didn't seem to like her very much, which seemed queer to Jack, who thought her attractive. Jack was not without experience, having passed four years in the classic—and otherwise—environment of Cambridge.

John Dodd pushed back his chair, and the men rose, well satisfied.

'Think you can manage without me this afternoon, Jack?'

'Yes, father.'

'I can't get back before supper.'

Hester was clearing the tables. He'd have to hurry if he caught her before she began to serve the guests in the dining-room upstairs. The men ate early.

'All right, father, I can get along. Say, Hester, want to go over to see Mary Pickford this evening?'

'Sure, I'd love to.'

'Can you be ready by quarter to eight? I'll be waiting. Father's going to Burlington this afternoon. He won't want the car to-night.'

Hester nodded happily over the tray piled high with dishes.

'Here, give me that. It's heavy. Are you sure you're strong enough for this work?'

Without replying, she picked up a handful of glasses and followed him up into the kitchen.

'I say, mother,' Hester heard Jack say as he set down the tray, 'can't Joe do more of this heavy work? It's too hard for Hester.'

His mother looked sharply at Hester. She'd been complaining to Jack, had she. Just what happened when you took in these college girls! Too proud to work, yet they were glad enough to get the money. And then spent it on stockings, silk stockings!

Jane Dodd's sharp face softened as she remembered how Jack had sent her a pair of beautiful grey silk stockings all the way from Boston, for Christmas, her first pair. He'd earned the money for them, too. She'd never worn them, but she had tried them on. They felt nice and cool. Maybe it was no wonder the girls liked them. Mustn't be too hard on them.

'Hester, Joe'll bring out the rest. You get into the dinin'-room an' see if everything's right. Them flowers you gathered look real pretty on the tables.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Dodd.'

Hester's eyes moistened suddenly. It had not been easy, taking a job the first summer after father died. This one at Bell Inn had been offered to her, and was the only one that attracted her. Bell Inn—it had a pleasant, restful sound. Hester had not been disappointed in Bell Inn, set among rolling hills and fields of waving grain, but the unusual work was fatiguing even for her young, vigorous body.

When she had served the twenty guests who had duly arrived in response to John Dodd's advertisements, and had set the tables for supper, Hester went to her small room in one of the towers of the old house. There were two towers, set at each end of the grey stone building. Very much out of harmony they looked on the pure architecture of a stern, early period.

Some one of the Dodds had added them, and the present John Dodd had committed the crime against art and beauty by building a broad porch, covering the simple colonial doorway and close-set, small-paned windows.

'Summer boarders must have a porch to sit on,' he responded firmly when young John remonstrated in the name of all that was beautiful. 'An' it's summer boarders that's putting you through college, my son, them an' the work you've been doing in that drug-store.'

The proprietor of Bell Inn was a just man. John had done his part, he ought to have credit.

Four windows faced the points of the compass. Hester always caught her breath when she looked out of any of them, particularly the East window. Row after row of mountains, black when the sun left them at evening, purple in shadow when dawn came creeping, faintly pearl and pink, while she was dressing. City bred was Hester Euwer; only when she was at college near Northampton had she known Nature's charm.

Of her mother, she had no remembrance. Father was an Englishman by birth, enlisting in a Canadian regiment during the Boer War, and elevated to the rank of Major. Too late in life he entered the World War, from which he returned in 1920 with shattered health and broken nerves.

Hester had been kept in boarding-school through her girlhood. Then in 1920 her father began a weary round of sanatoriums and hospitals. She was a Freshman at Smith College, not quite seventeen years old. Her father, whom she had seen only at long intervals, was almost a stranger to her.

It was during the long year after her graduation, spent in a small apartment in Mrs. McGee's Rooming House on West Seventeenth Street that she grew to know and love her brave father.

Money had seemed to her plentiful, her bills were promptly paid, her clothes renewed, there were even some pleasures and

amusements. Once, she had spent a week on Long Island, with Constance, her room-mate, at her country home, a villa in Italian style. The pleasures were, however, very rare. Summer vacations were spent with Mrs. McGee, an old acquaintance of father's, in whose house they lived later.

When the last taps sounded for Major Euwer, Hester found that the bank balance was exhausted. There were no relatives, so far as she knew. Once, in delirium, her father had spoken of home in England, the park, the deer, oak trees and a horse named Star, of which he was evidently fond. To her questions he gave evasive answers.

One day, late in April, he had written a letter, and in spite of her pleading to be allowed to post it, had dragged his feeble body down two flights of stairs, to the mail-box at the corner of Sixth Avenue. To this letter no reply ever came, and no identifying papers were found.

After much anxiety, little food, sorrow and no money, Bell Inn with its abundance, the tower room all her own, the trees and mountains, dawns and sunsets, seemed Paradise.

It had been less lonely since John had come from Harvard. Hester smiled, watching from her western window the row of men bending to sweep their scythes through golden grain.

'I wonder what I'd better wear,' she queried. 'White—that's prettiest. My lawn. It needs pressing. I'll go down now and do it.'

Hester ran down the stairs, noting as she always did the velvety texture of the mahogany railing, worn smooth by the touch of many, many hands, the graceful turn at the base.

John Dodd was getting into his car. A straight, handsome man was John Dodd. 'But hard,' thought Hester. 'I shouldn't like to owe him money.'

Hester shivered in spite of the heat. Money, money! How she hated the word. Yet one must have money in order to live. She would have to get some. How? Not by teaching. She

hated it. Not by stenography. Hester lacked patience. How else, then?

'Oh, well,' mused Hester, pressing the white lawn she had made herself. 'I might take up dressmaking, or get into a shop.'

She made a little grimace at herself in a glass hanging on the wall. Her own face caught her earnest attention in a new way.

Father had said to her once in a rare, talking mood, 'Hester, you are a beautiful girl, you look like your mother.' Fathers saw daughters through the eyes of love.

She examined her face critically. Eyes that sparkled; cheeks that glowed softly pink—the tint of dawn from the Eastern window; lips that smiled, showing a dimple in the right cheek, hair of russet red. Yes, Hester decided, she was not bad looking. And she was waitress at Bell Inn with no prospects in the future!

'What have we to-night? Your choice of beef hash, cold ham or lamb. Yes, madam, we have browned potatoes and fresh peas. Pie? Blackberry or custard?' she mocked, making jest of a job she disliked.

Hester slammed the iron down on the white lawn, held it up finished and bore it carefully away to the tower room.

'This evening, I'll go to the movies with John,' she said. 'Let fortune bring what it will. Who cares?'

Mrs. Dodd would not have recognized her demure waitress had she seen Hester, vital to her finger tips, graceful in every motion, whirling lightly around the room and singing an aria from *Martha* in a sweet, well-trained voice.

John Dodd came in late for supper. The men had eaten and gone their way to the store in the neighbouring village, where gossip centred.

'Set right here in the dinin' room, father,' said Mrs. Dodd. 'The boarders have all et. You're tired, ain't you? I saved

not biscuit, and there's good steak for you; cooked it special.'

Her husband sat down near an open window, while Mrs. Dodd duttered around him. For twenty-five years Jane Dodd had fluttered. Sometimes he liked it, and oftener it irritated him. To-night was one of the irritating times.

' I do wish you wouldn't fuss so, mother. Come an' sit down. Let Hester do the waiting.'

' Hester's goin' out, John, with Jack. See, they're gettin' in the car now. He was only waitin' till you got home.'

' I remember. He did tell me he wanted the car when I returned, but he didn't say anything about taking the girl out. Where are they going? '

' To the movies in Stanton. Now, father, we can't expect John to stay home all the time here at the Inn. He works good, days. John's no shirk. He's got a right to go out evenin's, an' it's more fun if a girl goes along. You was young once, father.'

John Dodd's heavy features softened. He looked at Jane, forty-five, but still comely.

' Yes, I was, an' so were you, Jane, an' we had some pretty good times. But it ought to be Virginia Lawrence that John takes to the movies and not the girl that waits on our table. What did he ask her to go all the way to Cambridge to that fuss they had in June for, if it didn't mean something? Lawrence is a wealthy banker, and Virginia can hold her own with the best. She's good-looking and well-educated, just come back from Europe and an only child who'll have lots of money. I won't have it, I tell you, Jane.' He pounded a big fist on the table. ' I'll talk to John——'

' Now, father, father, don't you get excited. Eat your steak, dear. John likes Virginia all right. He's just being kind, takin' Hester out. She don't have many good times an' hasn't any folks. Did you find Widow Dufour? '

'Kind,' echoed John Dodd. 'I saw Widow Dufour. She can't pay. I'll have to take the place, and I hate to do it. Jacques has come home.'

'Jacques!' exclaimed his wife. 'What's he come back for?'

'For no good,' growled Mr. Dodd.

Father was worried about that Dufour business, and now Jacques!

'Have some more cream on your blackberries,' urged Jane, his wife.

II

JACQUES DUFOUR RETURNS

THE 'Dufour Place' was surrounded by a wall, most unusual in the district near Stanton, Vermont. It was a wall of distinction, too, five feet high and one foot thick, built of a peculiar purplish granite found in a quarry back in the hills. Bits of quartz glistened in the irregular pieces. To-night, as Jack Dodd and Hester Euwer returned from their hours of amusement at Stanton, the moonlight glinted on tiny points with diamond lustre and made the old wall a thing of beauty. Ivy overhung it, and rose-vines, laden with heavy pink and crimson blossoms, swayed lightly to and fro.

'It looks like the pictures of homes in France,' said Hester. 'I didn't know that anybody except people like the Vanderbilts—millionaires who don't want folks to look into their backyards—ever built walls in these days.'

'No, more they don't,' agreed Jack. He drove very slowly.

'But you see these people are of French ancestry.'

'How interesting! Do tell me about them.'

Jack stopped the car, got out to pick a long spray of roses reaching almost to the flower-besprinkled grass, handed it to Hester, and sat down again by the wheel. He did not start the car. Glancing at Hester's bare head, her eager face upturned in the moonlight, he was impressed with the feeling that this was a pleasant situation which might be prolonged.

'Who are these French people?' she insisted.

'They came over from Canada about fifty years ago, father,

mother, and two sons. Dufour was the name, though gossip said that he had another and much greater name, was in fact a *grand Seigneur* from France who had belonged to a monarchist party and loathed the republic. They came here from Quebec. Mr. Dufour built the house. You'd like it, for it really is like a *château*, the kind one sees on the banks of the River Loire in France, only in miniature. Turrets and balconies and a sunken garden. Made a big sensation, believe me.'

' Could we go into it some time? '

' I don't believe so. I was never inside the house but once. Father Pierre visited there, the old priest, but very few others. The Dufours held themselves aloof. The Lawrences, he's a banker in Burlington, were admitted, but not our family.' Jack laughed.

' It's perfectly fascinating! Do go on! '

' At first, there was plenty of money. Then the old man died and one of his sons went to France. The other one married. His widow lives there now. Each year, they have grown poorer and poorer. All the servants left except one woman who does about everything. Grass has sprung up in the paths, and father says that the beautiful sunken garden is a sad sight, rare plants growing in confusion, the fountain stopped up with weeds, marble statues fallen down. It's all going to ruin.'

' Your father goes there, then.'

' Yes. He—he holds the mortgage.'

A sudden remembrance of something his father had said about Widow Dufour startled Jack into silence.

' Guess we'd better be getting home,' he said, starting the car.

' But isn't there anybody except the widow? '

' There's a son, Jacques. He used to run away and go fishing with me. Queer fellow. Plays the violin divinely. Was in Harvard a year, but the faculty decided that the University

could exist without him. Then he went to France to see his uncle and cousins, and joined the French Air Force. There he is now !'

' In France ? '

' No, standing by that iron gate, with the dog beside him.'

A young man, with tousled black hair massed above a face pallid in the moonlight, watched indifferently the approach of the automobile.

' A chevalier of France,' thought Hester, her heart beating fast with excitement. Vermont, staid, quiet, precise Vermont, offered an adventure !

' Back again, Jacques ? ' called John Dodd, fifth.

' Well, if it isn't Jack ! Give me your hand, old chap. How's fishing ? '

' Fine. Plenty of trout in the pool. We'll go and catch some.'

' Any time you say.'

Jacques' eyes were coal-black, set deep and rather close together. They rested on Hester, inquiringly. This young woman did not look like a native. There was a New York stamp on her. Pretty, too.

' Miss Euwer, this is my old playmate, Mr. Jacques Dufour,' said Jack, feeling unusual hesitancy in doing what was plainly expected.

Jacques bowed low in foreign fashion. Every movement of his slender figure was graceful. Under his small black moustache his lips parted in a smile at once admiring and respectful. Hester noted his aquiline, thin nose with delicate nostrils, his high cheek bones and the broad forehead from which his hair was pushed carelessly back. A new type, and a very interesting one, she decided. Being thoroughly American, with the firm idea that all are born free and equal, and that labour is honourable, Hester had utterly forgotten that she was a waitress at Bell Inn, whose business it was to

pass pork and cabbage to hungry reapers or present the daily menu to boarders.

She held out her hand to Jacques Dufour, who looked straight into her eyes as he shook it, rather languidly, as befitted a gentleman of France.

' May we meet soon again, Miss Euwer,' said the heir to the misfortunes of the House of Dufour, as Jack, in sudden and unexplainable irritation stepped on the gas and the car sprang forward with a jump.

' After all,' thought John, ' I don't know a thing against Jacques, except that he's proud as a prince and seems to be an idler, a crime in Vermont.'

He talked gaily with Hester until they drew up in front of Bell Inn, where hung the ancient sign, a large board bearing the painting of a bell. The lettering was ' Bell Tavern, 1779—John Dodd, proprietor.'

Father had discovered in a dark corner of the huge attic the original sign placed here by the first John Dodd. After restoring it with fresh paint, he suspended it from the wrought iron bracket, and thereby added virtue to his Inn and considerable cash to his bank account. That sign brought many tourists to Bell Inn, and its attractions were heralded far and wide.

' I've had such a good time, Jack! ' Hester smiled at him.
' Thank you.'

' We'll try it again.'

She vanished in the shadows of the doorway, running up the stairs to the tower room with light step so that she might not arouse Mr. and Mrs. Dodd, who slept with their bedroom door open in order to keep watch over the establishment.

John Dodd was not asleep. He heard Hester pass the door and Jack's movements in his room near by. Impatiently, he turned over, twisting his heavy body, tortured by sleeplessness. This Dufour business troubled him. To take away a home

from a widow, an invalid, no money, a scapegrace son, to throw this delicately-bred woman out into a world of which she knew nothing; how could he do it? Yet a man had to live, had to provide for his family. Didn't the Good Book say that a man should look out for those of his household?

It would be a fine place for John to take Virginia to, even Hiram Lawrence would not be ashamed to visit at the Dufour Place. It would be the Dodd Place then. But somewhere in the Good Book it talked about being kind to the widow and the fatherless. As far as the fatherless was concerned, which meant Jacques, John Dodd was not in the least worried. It was that sick widow.

John Dodd punched his pillow, turning it over to find a cool side. He was a God-fearing man, as were his forbears; he wanted to do what was right. On the other hand, he had inherited also from those forbears a deep respect for a dollar. Work and thrift had made the masters of Bell Inn rich men.

Widow Dufour did not pay either interest or principal. Was he to let her live right on there? And the property was deteriorating all the time.

Birds began to twitter in the elm and oak-trees. The moon set, and a faint glow appeared in the East. John Dodd fell asleep.

Jacques appeared early next morning at Bell Inn. His ruffled hair and handsome, insolent face met Mrs. Dodd's surprised gaze as she was baking cakes for the hungry men, who with John Dodd and his son ate at six-thirty.

'Good-morning, Mother Dodd,' Jacques said, smiling. 'Am I in time for breakfast? I've travelled far and wide in the past two years, but never did I eat any cakes to compare with yours. And *real* maple syrup! Yum, Yum!'

By this time, Jacques, the impudent, was in the big kitchen grasping both of Mrs. Dodd's hands in spite of the cake-turner.

Jane Dodd did not wish to return Jacques' smile, but her mouth relaxed. She had known this lovable rascal since he was a baby. Bell Inn was his favourite haunt, though his father protested in the name of the noble gentry of France, whose ancestry he boasted, and his mother wept because Jacques would associate with 'common folk.' More than once had Mrs. Dodd's capable hands spanked him soundly for eating all the doughnuts in the brown earthenware jar, or climbing to the very top of the big cherry-tree from which, if he had fallen, the heir to the weaknesses and vices of former generations would have broken his neck.

'So you're back,' she said, gravely.

'Hasn't the good news spread around the countryside? Yes'm. I'm back. Look who's here!' he exclaimed in enraptured tones. 'Good-morning, Miss Euwer.'

Hester stood in the doorway carrying two empty plates.

'They want more cakes, Mrs. Dodd,' she began, then caught sight of Jacques.

'Aurora,' he muttered. 'Symbol of the dawn in rose and gold and faint blue.'

'Jacques,' said Mrs. Dodd, severely, 'you talk like a silly fool. Go in the other room and eat your breakfast. Mr. Dodd's there and John. Here, Hester, give me them plates. Where did you see that young man before? It's evident he knew you. Called you by name.'

'When Jack and I came back from Stanton last night, he was standing by the gate. Jack stopped and we talked awhile.'

'He stopped, did he? Well, the less you see of Jacques Dufour the better off you'll be.'

Mrs. Dodd piled well-browned cakes on the plates.

Hester was young, she was a girl of to-day, with little fear of her elders and a fixed idea that her opinion was of value.

'He's very handsome and pleasant. What's he done that's so bad?'

' Them cakes is gettin' cold,' sputtered Mrs. Dodd, her face flushed from the heat of the fire on a blazing August morning and her annoyance. ' We'll leave discussin' Jacques' looks an' manners to some other time.'

' My land ! ' she muttered, relieving her feelings by beating up fresh batter, ' young folks is beyond me. If a waitress in old Mrs. Dodd's time had dared answer her like that she'd have been shown the door quick enough. " Handsome an' pleasant ! " Hum ! Scalawag an' shif-less, that's what he is. Goes for two years wanderin' around the country playin' his violin, leavin' his mother alone, an' now turnin' up an' expectin' us to kill the fatted calf an' put a ring on his finger. An' yet,' Mrs. Dodd spread half a dozen cakes on the griddle, relaxing a little, ' I ain't denyin' that Jacques has got a way with him. He can git around me sometimes. But the less Hester—an' John, too—sees of him the better for them an' all of us.'

A tight band closed around Jane Dodd's heart. She grasped the table, and looked through the kitchen window with troubled eyes which saw not the sunshine nor the red apples nestling among green leaves on the orchard trees.

Youth frightened her. They were so strong, these young men and maidens, so dead-sure of themselves, so scornful of old customs and habits. Even John—what was it he said one day? ' Surely, you don't believe that myth of Moses, mother.'

The faith of their fathers meant little to them. And yet, in their eager faces was a longing to *know*, they were not willing to take things for granted.

A line of an old hymn ran through Mrs. Dodd's troubled brain as she sliced bacon for the boarders' breakfast.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Burdened with a load of care?
Let us never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Mr. Dodd pushed back his chair with sharp sound on the wooden floor, nodding to Jacques. The men followed him.

'I'll be there soon, father,' called young John. 'Sit down, Jacques. Have some cakes.'

'Sure I will.' Jacques glanced after Hester's departing figure. 'What's she doing here?'

'Miss Euwer?' John's voice was cold. 'She's helping mother.'

'You mean she's waiting on tables. Gee, she don't look it.'

'Girl from Smith. Graduated in 1923. Came from New York.'

Jacques whistled. Putting butter and syrup on three cakes, he arranged them in a neat pile.

'So you've finished at Harvard.'

'Yes.'

'What are you going to do next? I suppose you haven't any intention of wasting your life as Jacques Dufour does?'

'I don't know what I'm going to do, but I know what I want to.'

'Why don't you do what you want to?' Jacques' voice was soft and melodious. When he sang, people were entranced. 'Life is short, Buddy, and we live but once.'

'Buddy.' It was the boyhood name, and warmed John's manly heart. There was a lot in what Jacques said, 'We live but once.' It wasn't original with Jacques. Philosophers from Plato down had said it, in various forms; it was the motto of to-day.

Jacques pushed back his chair.

'Thanks for an excellent breakfast. Any trout in the brook? What say we go a-fishing to-morrow morning? Get that pretty Smith girl to make us up some sandwiches. I'll bring the fruit. And I suppose she has some time off on Sunday. Ask her to help us inveigle the fish and while away a morning.'

'Father and mother will expect me to go to church with

them,' answered Jack Dodd, annoyed with himself because he flushed.

Jacques' eyes scanned his face. He gave a short, harsh laugh.

' So you hold by the old traditions. Church on Sunday. The New England mode of travel to heaven where congregations ne'er break up and Sabbaths have no end! Until I got back into this atmosphere of righteousness and bigotry I thought all this was a thing of the past. I suppose you went to chapel every day at Harvard? '

' No, I didn't,' replied Jack. ' So long, Jacques. I'll meet you to-morrow afternoon at three at the old place by the brook. And I'll ask Hester to come, too.'

' That's the boy! S'long.'

III

THE SABBATH DAY

EVER since Jack could remember, when he was at Bell Inn, Sunday morning had its routine, and nothing except serious illness was allowed to interfere with it.

'Here's your clean shirt, John,' his mother's voice said now, a little earlier than usual.

John writhed in his comfortable bed, and grunted.

'And, dear, maybe you'd better get up right away and take your bath—father's had his an' I took mine last night, late. The boarders'll be comin' along soon, an' you know how them city folks are about bathin'. You'd think they was born fishes. Clean towel's here on the chair.'

'All right, mother.'

There was no escape. Jack turned over to face the window and the sunshine. He grinned, thinking of the tiled bath-room he had shared at Harvard with Gray Lawrence, of Burlington. They had some great times, he and Gray, great times. Gray was to reach Burlington this week. Must go over. Ought to have gone to see Virginia before, but he'd been so busy, haying and—

Jack's face was graver than usual as he plunged into the tub, outwitting Mrs. Stewart, who was visible at the end of the hall clad in a brilliant scarlet kimona. Pretty things women wore these days. It would be a dull world without girls.

And there was Virginia. The plans were all made; Jack could not help knowing how his father and Mr. Lawrence had laid them out. John Dodd and Bell Inn were important in the community and even the leading banker in the neighbouring

city on the hillside by gleaming Lake Champlain did not disdain such an alliance.

Jack wrapped his long body in a huge bath-towel, and stood in the sunshine, regardless of the lady in the scarlet kimona impatiently waiting her turn.

'I'm to marry Virginia—I haven't any objection to Virginia, fine girl, known her all my life. Only I don't love her any more than I do, well, Hester. It's all cut and dried. Father forgets that things aren't done that way to-day.'

Hester's blue-clad figure, moving around in the garden, where mother raised old-fashioned flowers, sweet-smelling herbs and many roses, caught his attention. In fact, there was something about their waitress which sort of intrigued a man. Jacques had felt this, and Jacques was deeply experienced. Virginia was fine, just fine, but she lacked that peculiar quality, whatever it was. He could regard her as a sister and never feel a thrill; whereas a girl like Hester—

'There goes the bell! Oh, how I hate bells.'

Jack hurried to his room, put on fresh garments, well-cut coat of blue serge and immaculate white trousers, brushed his hair down as flat as he could—that curly kink never would brush out!—and slipped into his chair at the breakfast table. Fortunately, father was late—a very unusual occurrence.

On Sunday, the woman who helped mother in the kitchen was in charge. Mr. Dodd, handsome in grey suit, Mrs. Dodd, somewhat flushed by many exertions, and Jack sat together at a round table, while Hester waited on them.

It was a solemn meal. John Dodd was absorbed in his thoughts. Occasionally he glanced at Jack, finally impressing that young man with the idea that he, himself, was the centre of his father's meditations. It made him flushed and uneasy.

'It's got to come to a head soon, anyway,' he concluded, squaring his shoulders as he accepted a fourth roll and a second helping of crisp bacon and eggs. 'August will soon pass, and

by September I must make up my mind what I'm going to do.'

His subconscious mind prompted, ' by September, I'll do what father plans for me.'

' We'll be ready to start for church by quarter past ten, Jack.'

' Yes, father.'

Jack went out into the beauty of the morning where golden haze lay upon the green hills of Vermont. Insects were buzzing, locusts were proclaiming a fresh heat-wave. In mother's garden were deep, rich colours, blue of Canterbury bells, yellow of golden glow, dull pinks and reds of awkward zinnias, soft purple feathers on the asters. Among the flowers bees hummed seeking honey to carry to the row of hives over by the fence. The sign of the Bell hung motionless. There was neither cloud nor breeze. The August air was breathless. It would be a very hot day.

Under a group of elms was a table surrounded by wicker and canvas chairs. Jack stretched his long body out and stared at old Bell Inn. It was a wonderful house, the home of his ancestors. John Dodd, fifth, loved every stone of it. A heritage to be proud of. Here lay prosperity, a certain degree of social prestige reaching over the whole county and even to Burlington, not to be considered lightly.

And there could be added Virginia Lawrence with a fair-sized fortune in her own right from her dead mother, and a promise of much more to be divided between her and Gray when the banker should be gathered to his fathers. Virginia was the calm type, she'd never be set on fire by emotion, never did anything on impulse, was charming, well-educated.

She'd fit admirably into that old-world setting of the Dufour miniature chateau. Eventually, father would possess the Dufour Place, and Jack knew that it would be his. Virginia liked him as well as she would ever care for any one. Those days together at the Prom. week in Cambridge had shown him

that. She wasn't in love with him, nor he with her, but, after all, what did that matter nowadays? Of the men he knew who had been very romantic, terribly upset by some curly-haired girl, several were now divorced and going their own way. Virginia would be steady and sure. With her, life would be simple. Jack felt that he might be conceited, but he was pretty certain that Virginia would accept the proposition which their shrewd, yet kind fathers, had prepared. If the worst came to the worst, it was easy to get a divorce. Jane Dodd would have been horrified could she have read John's thoughts.

In this quiet, satisfactory mood, Jack accompanied his parents down the long, elm-hung way to the white church. People came in their cars for many miles to attend this service. Some drove horses, and brought their families in old-fashioned carriages. All of them knew the Dodds. There were many greetings and hand-shakings.

'Glad to see you here, John.'

'Must be glad to get through with college, John. Now you're ready to settle down.'

'I suppose so,' John answered, smiling at these friends, noting how the years had brought furrows and wrinkles in tanned cheeks. There were few young people. They had gone away to seek their fortunes.

Jack settled himself in his old place between his father and mother. The bench was straight and the seat hard. The walls were white, the windows open to let in the sunlight. A bird sang in the branches of a tree shading one window. All the glass was plain, except in the end, behind the pulpit. There a window glowed in purple, rose and gold. On it was the figure of the Good Shepherd, bearing upon His shoulders a little lamb. The Shepherd's feet were placed in soft green grass. About Him grew lilies, spotless petals, golden hearts. It was an exquisite window, designed by a famous New York artist.

Jack knew what the inscription was underneath the picture

of the Man with tender eyes bringing home the poor, lost lamb.

'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord'

John Dodd, 1740-1810. John Dodd, 1850-1918.

John Dodd, 1785-1860. John Dodd, 1875- .'

Father had been twenty-seven when he, Jack, was born. Well, father was getting on. He'd be fifty-one next January. It was only right that Jack should stay with him and help carry his burdens. Mother, too, was a little grey. She was a nice-looking mother. He had much to feel happy about, and Virginia, with her cameo-features, her well-bred air, would fit in with this church, this genuine old building with pure, straight lines.

The second John Dodd built it; father paid for restoring it, without alterations, and put in that beautiful memorial window. Below his name was a long space.

'John Dodd, 1902-' would be placed there, and maybe other John Dodds to follow. Jack's face flushed. To sit here in the old pew, with another John beside him—

What was the minister saying?

'Yea, we have a goodly heritage.'

A goodly heritage! Why let it go for an idea, an ambition? For the first time since he had begun to contemplate this goodly heritage, John Dodd felt a ripple in the calm pool of his reflections. It was too easy—all too easy, though very pleasant.

After dinner, Jack removed his immaculate attire. Robed in rough tweed, he appeared in the kitchen, now deserted except for Hester, preparing sandwiches.

'Got 'em ready, Hester? I'll carry the basket. My! you look fine.'

'It's my new wash silk,' she said, laughing. 'Got it at a bargain and made it myself.'

Jack examined the dress.

'Cunning little rosebuds on it. The only thing we men can spread ourselves on is neckties and socks.'

'And very proud you are of those. Talk about girls and their vanity cases! I've seen men preen themselves before mirrors and big panes of window-glass as they went along the streets.'

'You slander us. Are you ready? Come along. Jacques will be waiting.'

'Is Mr. Dufour to be there? Have I made sandwiches enough?'

'Mr. Dufour is. Yes, you have. Let's go.'

Suddenly, Jack realized that he was sneaking, actually sneaking out of the back door so that mother wouldn't know that he was going fishing on Sunday afternoon. Mother would not like him to go fishing; father would like it less. It simply wasn't done, Jack knew that.

The mood of the morning ebbed away.

Never mind what the John Dodds had always done, this John Dodd was not going to be bound down by custom and prejudice. It was prejudice. Just because father and grandfather had considered it wrong to go fishing on Sunday there was no reason at all why he shouldn't go. He did not think it was wrong. Besides, he'd gone to church in the morning, he'd done his duty and kept up the tradition of the Dodds. That was enough.

These were modern times; he belonged to a new generation, he and Hester and Jacques. Virginia—he was not sure about Virginia, as a product of a new and more enlightened period. Virginia had peculiar views, and she was set; yes, set. That was a good thing in a way.

Jack's mother sat under the trees with Mrs. Stewart and two other women. On Sundays, mother was not the cook. She was Mrs. John Dodd of Bell Inn.

It had taken only a moment for these thoughts to flit across Jack's brain. His face assumed a stubborn look. He resembled father and grandfather.

Picking up the basket, followed by Hester, who had no conception of the ferment he was in, Jack turned, went through the wide hall, and out of the front door.

'Mother,' he said, clearly, but with a tremor in his young voice, 'Hester and I are going fishing with Jacques Dufour. We'll have a picnic supper at the trout-pool.'

In his heart was rage. Why need he feel like a little boy, afraid of mother!

Mother was so dazed that she was struck dumb. Not until Jack and Hester were almost out of sight did she find breath to say, remembering Mrs. Stewart and the others, 'Oh, well.'

In her soul, mother quaked.

'Father won't like him to go fishin' on the Sabbath,' she thought. 'With our waitress an' that rascal Jacques Dufour, an' in those awful clothes, too! Dear me.'

It was cool by the trout-pool. Deep green shadows moved on the rippled surface of the water. In spite of the placidity of nature, there was a tenseness about the three young people which electrified the atmosphere.

'Come on,' Jacques had called impatiently, as Jack with his basket, Hester walking lightly beside him, approached through the grey trunks of the splendid trees.

Relaxing at sight of Hester, Jacques sprang to his feet.

'Here's a nice mossy place, Miss Euwer.' In his heart he was saying, 'Pity she's a waitress. She'd make a sensation in the movies.'

'I brought the bait, Jack,' he went on. 'Seemed like old times to dig worms. Reminded me of those days you and Virginia and I used to come here to catch trout. Cooked 'em over a brush fire. Remember?'

'Yes,' answered Jack gruffly.

He was still irritated by the encounter with his mother. He hadn't sneaked away; that much to his credit. And why

should he feel guilty about a little quiet fishing? Rising bells—church—a net closing around him—Virginia—how was he going to stand years and years of it!

'How is Virginia, by the way?' Jacques deftly fastened wriggling bait on a hook. 'Want to fish, Miss Euwer? I suppose it would be easier if I called you Hester, wouldn't it? And my name is Jacques.'

Hester leaned luxuriously against an oak tree. She laughed. Hester knew how to laugh, reflected Jacques. She didn't giggle or tinkle—he hated tinkling laughter. Hers was just girlish and merry. There was something about this girl.

'Guess Virginia's all right. Only saw her once. Gray's coming this week.'

'Then there'll be doings. Dull old place, this.'

'If you were as busy as I am you wouldn't have time to think about whether it was dull or not,' growled Jack.

'The fellow's got a grouch to-day,' Jacques confided to Hester. 'Must be something about Virginia.'

Hester thought this over, watching the two young men as they threw out their lines. Who was Virginia, and why was Jack supposed to be interested? And Gray must be Virginia's brother. After all, what was it to her?

It was very still. Noise would frighten away the trout. One by one John and Jacques pulled in the lovely, silvery creatures, until six plump fish were in the basket Jacques had brought.

'That's enough,' John said at last. 'Your mother will enjoy them for lunch to-morrow.'

'I hope so. She doesn't eat much. I'm worried about mother.'

'And yet—'

Jacques was swift at understanding.

'And yet,' he responded in that tone which cut like ice, an inheritance from some remote aristocrat of a Chevalier, 'I went away and left her for two years.'

'You did.' Jack was in a mood to pick a quarrel.

' If you had the courage of a mouse you'd do it, too.'

Jack sprang to his feet, glaring at Jacques Dufour. The scene was laid for a grand rumpus.

' Don't you think that some sandwiches would taste good? ' suggested Hester, with womanly guile, beginning to spread a linen cloth on the moss. ' Chicken, ham, and—'

Jacques put out his hand to John Dodd.

' I didn't mean a thing, old chap. But it does make me rage to see you with your gifts and education buried here. I suppose you intend to settle down at Bell Inn, marry Virginia, and—'

It was as if Jacques had touched an inflamed spot; he came so close to the truth that Jack writhed inwardly.

' I'll take a sandwich, please, Hester,' he said, unsteadily.

Hester's brain was whirling. Life here at Bell Inn was not so calm and peaceful as it seemed to be. A volcano was seething within the person of John Dodd, fifth. It threatened to break out at any moment.

' Where have you been, Jacques? ' John asked.

' Wandering over the face of the earth. Long, long ago there was a gentleman who did that, you know.' Jacques spoke lightly, but the gleam in his eye was sombre. ' Sort of fallen angel, you remember.'

' You shouldn't joke so,' said Hester. (There were volcanoes here all right.)

' I'm not joking. Sometimes a devil gets into a man and drives him furiously. He forgets about his mother and that he's leaving her alone. He picks up his violin, packs a clean shirt and comb and brush, a few books in his knapsack, and says to the devil, " Come on. Let's go and do as we like. Let's forget everybody else." And the devil leads him out and shows him the kingdoms of the world.'

John drew a long breath.

Hester spoke into the stillness. The sun was dropping into a heavy cloud. Occasionally thunder growled in the distance.

'Did it pay?'

The sound startled her and John.

'I'll say it did,' was Jacques' forceful reply. 'We're all young. Let's break loose, you and Jack and I.'

Suddenly he laughed, leaping to his feet. His pale face with piercing black eyes hung above the others, faintly visible in the dusk.

'Time to get back or we'll be caught in a shower. I'll take these ungodly trout to mother, with your compliments, Jack. Good-bye.'

His laugh floated back to John Dodd, whose blood, hot and rebellious, pounded through his veins.

IV

ENTER VIRGINIA

RARELY in these weeks spent at Bell Inn had Hester Euwer felt the restrictions of a person employed to do another's bidding. Mrs. Dodd had been considerate, though not especially cordial, with John always in the back of her mind. It would not do to have him tied up with this undeniably pretty girl, although she was fully fitted by education to be his wife, while Virginia was in the vision of John's future.

John Dodd, the father, noticed her little, but was always courteous, frowning on any attempts on the part of the men whom she served to show her familiarity.

'She ain't like the others we've had, Jane,' he told his wife, 'and we must see that she isn't annoyed.'

However, his own son began to take notice of Hester, to drive out with her in the car. When he met Jack and Hester that Sunday evening as they came running in out of the storm which broke suddenly—Jack had seized Hester's hand and was pulling her along—John Dodd became seriously worried.

This attractive waitress might upset everything. In truth, he needed not to be anxious. Jack had no sentiment about Hester except that she was, as he expressed it, 'easy to look at.' Always tastefully, neatly gowned in clothes the fruit of her own hands and needle, her hair glossy and curly, her colour bright, eyes dancing with cheerfulness or tender with kindness and sympathy, Hester was indeed an asset in the midst of an undeniably monotonous existence. She filled a space for Jack; that was all.

His father, belonging to the old school, understood no middle ground such as the youth of the twentieth century stood upon. In his young days, a 'pal' was unknown. Either you paid attention to a girl with a view to marrying her, or you let her alone. He said little, but was truly scandalized and even terrified when Jack and Hester flung their lithe young bodies into the car after supper and rushed off around the country.

John Dodd listened for their return, relieved when the lights of the automobile shone brilliantly on the white wall of the bedroom. Sincerely, and with true piety, he thanked God that Jack was safely home again.

To tell the truth, neither he nor Mrs. Dodd worried at all over Hester. Nobody worried over Hester, for the very simple reason that there was not one soul who cared for Hester. Occasionally came a letter from her room-mate at Smith College; she had been married last year to Paul Fitz-Maurice, a young architect in New York. One or two other girls wrote at long intervals, and one young man, who had known her in New York, Angus Mackensie, of Scotch descent.

He had been very helpful when her father was ill, had been her only friend. She did not want to lose touch with Angus. He was a bond salesman, doing well. Hester felt pretty sure that she could marry Angus almost any time, and have a pleasant bungalow out in the Oranges, in New Jersey. Angus could go in to New York every day. There would be a garden and a veranda with a swinging seat and porch-chairs.

Perhaps there would be little children running about in the garden. There were times when this vision appealed to Hester's common sense. Angus was nice and very good-hearted. She'd have to take Angus with the bungalow, however.

'Not yet,' was the decision that Hester always came to when this vision hung before her mind. She wanted romance. Angus was not romantic. But he could give her an electric stove in the kitchen.

'What are you going to do when you leave here?' Jack had asked as they returned from a long ride on the Tuesday evening after the fishing excursion.

Each of them knew that the other had not forgotten Jacques Dufour's strange outbreak or his appeal to them. It had gone too deep, was something to think about, not discuss. They were thinking, too.

'Go to New York, first, and then—I don't know what. I must earn, I suppose. But, oh, I want to see life! Everything around us is *alive*. The birds sing in the trees, the roses run riot, the storms come—they are splendid. I want to live while I'm young and can enjoy. I suppose the best thing is to get a place as governess.' Her voice became dull.

'Safe job,' replied Jack, as they came to Bell Inn.

Hester did not know that this was the last ride she would take with Jack during her stay at Bell Inn.

And the reason why it was the last lay in the exquisite personality of Virginia Lawrence, suddenly and effectively thrown upon the scene beside that of her brother Gray. They appeared at Bell Inn the very next day, arriving in a long car of cream-tint, driven by Virginia's capable hands.

Instantly, everything was changed, and for the first time Hester felt that she was only the waitress, had no individuality whatever.

Virginia's voice was musical, but convincing. It put Hester exactly where she thought Hester ought to be. A mighty spirit of rebellion sprang up within Hester Euwer.

'Is Mr. John Dodd here?'

Hester's rebellious spirit inspired her.

'Yes. He's in the office. Shall I call him?'

'I say, my sister doesn't mean the old man,' put in Gray.

Hester liked Gray's looks, but her spirit did not weaken. Her blue eyes met Virginia's truly beautiful orbs fully and each girl measured the other in swift antagonism.

'Perhaps,' Hester went on, sweetly, 'you mean Jack Dodd.' ('I'll shock her!')

'Just him,' Gray said.

Blue and brown eyes unlocked. Contest was deferred to another time.

'You'll find him in the hayfield,' Hester said, disappearing into the house.

'And he'll be all hot and sweaty,' she thought, jubilantly, 'with the old shirt open at the neck and his hair tousled. What a horrid girl I am! I might have warned him. It wasn't fair to send them out to see him now, in the middle of the morning, to find him tired and dirty——'

She ran to her tower room, and stood by the window overlooking the fields, her hand pressed over her breast, heaving violently.

'She's gone out there, too, she'll see him like that. It must be Virginia, and that is Gray, Jack's friend. Am I in love with Jack Dodd that I acted so horrid? No, I'm not. Not one bit. It's just jealousy because she's so lovely and well-dressed and drives a car and has a brother, and father is rich. While I'm the waitress. Her eyes told me so.'

They were coming toward the house. Jack walked between the girl and the man. His hair was tousled, and he was hot and disreputable, and he didn't care one bit. Neither did they, for that matter. How they laughed and chattered! She, Hester Euwer, for all her upbringing, her splendid, brave father, her years of careful training, was the waitress at Bell Inn. Between her and Virginia there was a great gulf fixed.

The cream-tinted automobile was moving away now. Three figures were crowded into the front seat. In the centre was Jack Dodd. No hat; old clothes.

From the day of Virginia's appearance at Bell Inn, everything was changed. Jack no longer worked in the fields with the men. Neither did he and his father eat in the

downstairs dining-room. A new cook from Burlington presided in the kitchen, though Jane Dodd hovered anxiously near and insisted on doing the baking. All three dined and supped at a well-spread table, and Hester served them as she did the boarders. As a privilege, Mrs. Dodd allowed her to eat in peace, later, alone. Naturally this exception did not make the rest of the 'help,' all of whom came from near-by towns or farms, any too friendly.

Not that Hester could be 'at peace.' She was seething within her soul. Although by nature a very pleasant, gracious girl, she had suddenly developed a resentful mood. Nothing was right; Bell Inn was lonely, the boarders were snobs (by no means true), Mr. and Mrs. Dodd belonged to the past numbers, Jack was showing himself in his real character, and everything went wrong.

Perhaps Hester was not so much to blame, being human. The situation was trying for a girl of high spirit who knew that she could look as pretty as Virginia at the Lawn Party to be given next week at Mr. Lawrence's home, overlooking broad Lake Champlain, its steamers loaded with carefree tourists, its sail-and motor-boats. From the porch, one could look across at the great hotel, at the New York shore, behind which rose the pine-clad mountains of the Adirondacks. Jack had pointed it all out to her.

The Lawn Party! Even Mrs. Stewart was invited, and her gawky daughter. But no invitation came for Hester. In her moments of common sense—rare enough!—Hester laughed, somewhat bitterly. Why should Virginia Lawrence dream of asking her to join the festivities? Since that first visit of Virginia and Gray, Hester had not exchanged a word with her. Gray was different.

It was while Hester was in this almost desperate mood, cut to the depths of her pride, angry chiefly with Jack, who had seemed so friendly, two things happened, and it was the U.S.

mail which caused these unexpected occurrences. The postman came whistling up the path, bringing a package of letters.

'Good-morning, miss,' he said cheerfully. 'There's a registered letter for a Major Hugh Euwer, redirected from New York here. Know anybody by that name among the boarders?'

'I'll take it. That was my father's name.'

'Oh!' said the boyish postman. 'Maybe, because it's registered, you'd better ask somebody to identify you. Just a formality, miss,' he apologized.

Jack was coming out of the house.

Hester's voice trembled. 'Will you tell the postman that I'm Hester Euwer, please, Jack?'

'That's who she is, all right. I'll look over the letters and see if I draw anything.'

Hester signed, scarcely able to see the words she wrote. It was almost like receiving a message from the dead. 'Major Hugh Euwer.' Everything came back in an instant. The long, quiet days, her father's loving touch, his tender voice, those last moments. She turned to go with this letter to her own room.

'I say, Hester, here's another for you. Guess I know what it is. I told Virginia—'

Jack smiled triumphantly. He beamed upon her as though much pleased.

Hester's tears dried. A hot wind seemed to scorch her. Jack's smile appeared sinister, mocking. How we twist and torture ourselves when resentment, a canker eats at our hearts!

She snatched from his hand a square, white envelope. Quite evidently an invitation. Instinct told her that it bid her come to the Lawn Party.

'You told Virginia!' she breathed fiercely, her nostrils vibrating with anger.

'Yes, decidedly,' thought Jack, 'Hester is terribly wrought up over something these days. Mother said she was glad

Labour Day would soon be here so Hester could go. You'd think she'd be glad to be invited. Oh, well——'

Jack's temper, easily excited, began to rise.

' Of course I told her. How else could she know about you? It's a big party, and she said she didn't mind a bit asking you.'

A glance at Hester's pale face and gleaming eyes made him pause and realize the implications he was making.

' I've put my foot in it now,' he muttered.

With a quick movement, Hester tore the white envelope and its contents, unread, into fragments, threw them at Jack, and ran into the house. Somebody laughed.

At the foot of the steps stood Jacques Dufour, clad, as was his custom, in the whitest of linen suits. In his hand was a tennis racket.

' Nice little tantrum,' observed Jacques. ' She doesn't seem to like something. Or maybe it's you she's took a dislike unto.'

John picked up the small pieces of paper, dropping them into his pocket. Mother hated to have the porch all littered up. He was thankful that none of the boarders were sitting in the rocking-chairs.

' I guess it's both. Come on, Jacques, jump in. Virginia will be waiting.'

It took them just ten minutes to cover the twelve miles to Burlington, up and down steep hills. Jacques did not mind. The faster things went the more fun it was. If the smash came, why, you just went out like the snuffing of a candle. Sooner or later, the candle of life was snuffed out. It didn't much matter when.

Jacques watched John's face, saw the set of his mouth, felt the tenseness of his body. There was a smile on Jacques' face.

' Wonder what kicked up the row between him and that pretty waitress,' he mused.

Hester was, certainly, as Jacques had said, in a ' nice little tantrum.' It had all come to a head so suddenly. The heat,

the work, the loneliness, the humiliation, the jealousy of that other girl who had so much while Hester Euwer had so little, all these had combined to produce as ugly and revolting a mess in her soul as that which the witches mingled in their cauldron in *Macbeth*. A devil's mixture.

Throwing upon the table the letter addressed to her father, Hester did the usual act. She dropped down on the bed and cried and cried.

Great-grandfather's clock in the hall struck twelve, and did some quaint stunts; it was a fine old clock, worth a lot of money, and was a constant source of envy to dabblers in antiques who roved the country. They had uselessly tried to persuade the proprietor of Bell Inn to part with it.

' So long as there is a John Dodd, that clock stays just where it is,' was his reply.

They began to be convinced that he meant it, and went away in grief and anger.

The ancient time-piece tried to tell Hester that she must come down and see to the tables. It did its loudest and best, but Hester didn't care whether the boarders ate or not. If she thought of them at all, she rather wished for them—though they had done her no harm—a dinnerless day.

For an hour tears had been oozing out of Hester, bitter, salt tears, and, as is our human way, as the oozing continued, her anger oozed, also, till there came a moment when she wondered what she had been so wrought up over. Such is the blessing of tears!

At quarter after twelve, Mrs. Dodd tried the door. Finding it locked, she shook it. Jane Dodd was excited. This had never happened before.

' Hester! ' she called.

No answer.

' Hester! Are you sick? Open the door.'

A very meek, utterly subdued voice replied.

'No, ma'am. I'm not sick. I'll be right down. Didn't know what time it was.'

Hester looked at herself in a small, square mirror.

'I am a sight. But I've got to go down. "Corn-beef, mutton to-day. No cabbage, madam? There's apple pudding and lemon jelly!"'

Hester's tone was no longer bitter as she mockingly repeated the *menu*. It was almost cheerful. She felt light and clean, as if the tears had washed out her soul and had engulfed the ugly devils that had taken hold of her.

She had a queer feeling that she would like to creep into the old church and kneel on the hard floor in the stillness, while a bird sang in the elm-tree. There might be something there, some spirit of peace and holiness to help her. She didn't know. Religion had not been a part of their family life. Father did not believe much of anything.

Utterly forgetting the letter which came registered, Hester left it lying face down on the table and hurried to her duties.

'We have corn-beef and cabbage, Mrs. Stewart.' (After all, Helene Stewart wasn't gawky.) 'Mutton, then? And creamed carrots. Apple pudding? Yes, Mrs. Stewart.'

V

MUSIC BY THE TROUT-POOL

'O H, I forgot that letter!'

Hester opened it carefully, noting that the envelope was coarse in texture, somewhat yellowed, as if the writer's correspondence was small and paper was seldom needed. The postmark was blurred, but the State was evidently New Mexico. Who could dad have known in New Mexico? The writing was angular, the language that of an educated man. 'Leonard' was signed to the letter, with an address in the corner, Leonard Euwer, Pepper Tree Ranch, Santa Fé, New Mexico.

'How interesting!' breathed Hester. 'He must be a relative, Euwer is not a common name.'

Her heart was throbbing violently. She had thought herself alone in the world, and now—now—one of her own blood had written. What did he write?

'My dear Hugh,

'After so many years, to receive a letter from you was indeed a pleasure. Strange how lads who have grown up together, have ridden across the moors, fished in the same streams, gone up to Oxford and been such close companions, should be separated. Stranger still that we should both have drifted to these United States.

'When we met in New York your hair was powdered with white and mine was changing. You told me of your daughter, Hester, and showed me her picture and that of your wife who left you so lonely. A lovely girl, your Hester; away at college, you said. As you know, my romance was shattered over in the Old Country. I left it behind me and crossed the ocean that I might forget. One does not forget, but the wound is healed

over, only occasionally does it open, for I am busy and, except that I have none of our own kin near me, happy in my work.

‘ You write of your illness, that Hester is with you, that you feel yourself failing. Cousin Hugh, why not come out here and visit me on the Pepper Tree Ranch? Come and stay. Of course, bring Hester with you. To see my niece here, to hear her laugh, to have music in these silent rooms, that would be joy for a lonely fellow like me.

‘ The house is big, the ranch stretches over several acres and there is plenty for all of us. God is good to those who dwell in these wide spaces. He gives us dry air to breathe, and vistas of colour to delight the eye. There is health and happiness here for you. Come!

‘ I wrote twice before, a couple of years ago, having this in mind, but you had removed, not leaving an address. The letters were returned stamped “ Unknown.” It made me sad to be so completely out of touch with you, so few of us Ewers are left.

‘ The Baronet, Sir Hugh, Leonard, John, Edward—such a string of names, all of them associated with our forbears—were still alive when last I had news from Chichester. Our Cousin Edward is living, has lost a son in the late war, I do not know whether there were other sons. Perhaps the title and lands may come to you some day! Not that wealth or title is anything to be desired. For me, they have no value. But I have no Hester! ’

‘ Title—lands—the Baronet——’ Hester’s brain whirled. She read on :

‘ If, dear Hugh, it should be as you intimate, that you are pressing on toward eternity and its glories, that each day brings you nearer to God, where He will welcome you as a father greets his children who are coming home from a long journey, how happy you will be! ’

Strange language! Cousin Leonard implied that dad had just gone home to his Father; he was not dead. Of course, Hester had heard such things before, in church, at chapel, in college, but they never seemed real. People did not talk of eternity and God in this off-hand way, at least not the people she knew.

What would this new cousin, appearing in her life so suddenly, have thought of the ‘lovely girl’ whose picture dad had exhibited with pride, if he had seen her only two hours before tearing up an invitation sent her, no doubt, in kindness and courtesy, throwing the fragments at Jack Dodd, whom she had no reason to dislike? A ‘lovely girl’ indeed! Hester nervously tapped the floor with her foot. What had possessed her to act like a spoiled child?

That was all. No, here was a note, stuck in the flap, addressed to her.

‘Dear Hester,

‘Perhaps the Lord has already taken your dear father to Himself and you are left alone. Let me hear from you at once. I greatly regret my delay in replying to his letter, but was obliged to be away from home in a remote section, where my mail could not be received. Three months is a long time; much may happen.

‘This is your home, Hester. I cannot be to you what your father was, but I will do my best to supply his place.

‘Enclosed is a cheque for three hundred dollars. If your father is able to travel, it will be sufficient to bring you both here. It may be that you need doctors or medicine or comforts. Money vanishes as the dew, in illness. A city is a cheerless place and often a lonely one. Nature is more friendly than a crowd.

‘In case you are left alone, use this for whatever you need and for your ticket to Santa Fé, where I will meet you. The cheque is made out in your name. Let me know if you want more money, and write at once to

‘Your loving Cousin Leonard.’

‘Your loving Cousin Leonard.’ Three hundred dollars. A home. Someone who belonged to her. Hester was too dazed to reply at once to this letter, startling in its contents. It required thought. Her duties here could not be neglected. Until after Labour Day she could not leave Bell Inn. It was not fair to Mr. and Mrs. Dodd; her place could not be supplied for just

two weeks. Besides the work would not be hard while she had this prospect to buoy her up.

'I'll go to the trout-pool,' Hester decided. 'It's quiet there. I must think and plan. First, to New York to get the things in storage, or dispose of them. Then to the ranch. Ranch! how fascinating it sounds. I suppose that Cousin Leonard is rich. People are who own ranches, I've heard. Jack spoke about a splendid ranch where Virginia and Gray Lawrence go sometimes in summer. Their father owns it.'

Across the fields to the woods went Hester. It was cool under the trees. Hark! what was that music? She followed the sound which led her to the pool where she and John and Jacques had fished on that hot Sunday afternoon. It must have been a long time ago. No, only last Sunday, only three days ago. Hester separated some branches, peeping between them and listening. This was no amateur bringing music from his violin, it was an artist drawing his bow so deftly over the strings that the melody sounded like a glorified human voice. Wrought with joy and trills was the melody as if a flock of birds were splitting their little throats in ecstasy. On a stump sat Jacques Dufour, wearing his white linen suit, as Hester had seen him that morning when he started off in Jack's car to play tennis with Virginia Lawrence in Burlington. Probably he had returned in the noon motor-bus and Jack had stayed for luncheon with the Lawrences. His mass of deep-black hair was flung back in disorder. She saw that his whole being was transformed. Gone was the languor, the inertia which she had despised. He swayed slightly as he played, every nerve of his body, every muscle responding to the music. The rascal Jacques, the idler, who wandered around the country leaving his widowed mother alone in the miniature château, the wilful, reckless vagabond, was at this moment, by the trout-pool, a musician of highest order.

Hester and her father had loved music. Together, they had

listened to the moving strains of Fritz Kreisler, to the marvellous technique of Jascha Heifetz. In Jacques, she recognized a genius. He drew his bow lingeringly over the final notes, and without raising his head, said, ' Hester, you'd better come here and sit down. You make me nervous hiding that way.'

She stepped out on the moss.

' How did you know I was there? ' she asked in amazement. ' I didn't want to disturb you. It was so beautiful. I had no idea that you could play that way.'

' No? Don't know very much about me, do you? ' He had not looked at her, twanging the strings discordantly. ' I heard you coming.'

' Not while you were playing. You couldn't! '

He raised his eyes. They glowed, living coals, alight in a white face. Strange eyes; better not look into them, might get burned, was her swift thought.

' I did not hear you with my ears, but with my senses. You're the kind of girl, Hester Euwer, that a man does not need to hear or see. He feels.'

A delightful shiver passed through Hester. Nobody ever talked to her that way. A certain sense of danger, of electric sparks, only added to her unusual excitement.

Jacques began to play again, very softly. He was not looking at her now; apparently he was oblivious to her presence. She dropped down on moist moss, laid her hands in her lap and listened, dreamily. Weird was the music; little half-notes, wailing as of lost souls; here a touch of exquisite harmony, there the clash of chords, one upon the other, so sharp that they hurt. Russia—women fallen into the arms of brutes—children crying for their lost mothers—cities running with blood. Then wide fields, splashed with the purple and gold and pink of blossoms—sheep following a shepherd—girls sitting at the doors of rustic huts. A flute sounded, a voice sang. Back they were

on the borders of the Neva; soldiers were marching. Darkness. Death. Horror.

'Stop!' she cried, harshly. 'I can't stand it.'

He paused on a broken chord, laying the instrument in the box. 'I wanted to see whether you could feel it,' he said. 'It is as I thought.'

On her lips hung the question, 'What is?' Instinct made her pause. Again that impression of danger here. She wanted to laugh, but laughter seemed far away. Danger, by the trout-pool, near Bell Inn, with the rumble of passing automobiles on the State Road—it was ridiculous! Yet Hester knew that it was not physical danger which she feared. She was not in the least afraid of Jacques Dufour, personally. What then? Her soul had been strangely stirred by a new and powerful influence.

Behind that truly exquisite music lay not the gentle spirit of Fritz Kreisler, but a mysterious power of which Jacques Dufour was the medium. He smiled and instantly fell into a position of his customary languor. His face and attitude were changed. Hester could well believe that Madame Dufour adored him and denied him nothing. At least, such was the gossip of the community. Jacques rose, stretched as if sleepy, and sat down beside Hester on the moss.

'We had a good game,' he said. 'Virginia and Jack won. I played on Gray's side. He would have won if he'd had a decent partner. I'm no good at games—or anything else.'

'The violin?'

'Oh, that. I've played ever since I was five years old. Father taught me. It's his violin, a Stradivarius. I can't help playing. It's in me. Sometime,' he added in a casual tone, 'I expect I'll play myself into hell.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, and maybe—maybe my playing will take others along with me. I composed that thing I played. How did it make you feel? Did it mean anything to you?'

He was watching her face under drooping lids.
Hester told him. Russia—the brutes—the shepherd—
Jacques nodded. ‘ You could see it. You’d better not listen
to my playing.’

Hester was startled. ‘ Why not? ’

He did not answer.

‘ Jack come back? ’

‘ No.’

‘ Are you going to Virginia’s party? ’

‘ I don’t think so.’

Jacques laughed, amused at his remembrance of the bits of paper.

‘ You’ve got a little devil in you, Hester Euwer. Did you know it? That’s why you understand my music.’

‘ I’d better go. What time is it? ’

‘ Half past four. Lots of time yet before you have to wait on those folks. A waitress, you, with the spirit of the future in you.’

‘ What future? ’

‘ I don’t know exactly, but I think I’m in it somewhere. The future! If one could only look into a crystal and see what was going to happen! Maybe it’s better not to know. Might make us very uncomfortable. I don’t like to be uncomfortable.’

He was a boy again, just a mischievous boy. There couldn’t be any harm in Jacques Dufour.

‘ I say, don’t go yet.’

She was standing by the big, drooping tree. It was so still that she heard the trout leaping in the clear water, reflecting the green of overhanging leaves.

‘ I must, Jacques.’

‘ I say, when shall I see you again? It’s not possible for me to come to Bell Inn much. Dodd doesn’t like me. It might make trouble for you, too.’

‘ On the whole,’ said Hester, deliberately, ‘ I’m not at all

sure that I want to see you again. We've met just twice and you act as if we were old friends.'

'We are. I knew it from the first time I saw you. Time makes no difference. There's something deeper.'

'Good-bye,' said Hester. 'Thank you for the music.'

Against her will, she turned, after taking a few steps, and looked at him.

Insolently, he threw her a kiss. She heard his laughter as she ran toward Bell Inn.

No, she did not care whether she ever saw Jacques Dufour again. He was impertinent, a dangerous man.

'You look kind of feverish, Hester,' Mrs. Dodd said, meeting her on the porch.

That evening, Hester wrote to Leonard Euwer at Pepper Tree Ranch, New Mexico.

'Dear Cousin Leonard,

'I'm all alone and shall be so happy to come to you. I will do anything that I can to make you happy in return for your great goodness to me. Thank you very much for the cheque.

'Just now, I'm working as waitress at the Bell Inn, near Burlington, Vermont—(maybe he'll think that strange, but I'm not ashamed of it)—and cannot leave before September 6. Then I will go to New York and write you more definitely from there, so that you will know when to meet me at Santa Fé.

'With love,

'Hester.'

VI REVOLT

THE Dodds were late to breakfast on the morning after Virginia's party.

' You needn't wait for me, Jane,' John Dodd had called as he passed the open doorway of the kitchen. ' I've got to see to that sick cow.'

' I ain't in any hurry.'

Mrs. Dodd carefully moulded loaves into symmetrical form. She wanted to think. Her brain was not quick. It worked better when her hands were busy. Her husband returned and they sat down at their table near the pantries and the kitchen. From this point Mrs. Dodd could keep her eye on everything that was brought in by Hester and the other girl from Stanton. Everything was crowded on this week-end before Labour Day. She'd keep Ida on after Hester left on Tuesday.

' Ain't John down yet?'

' No, father, you know he was out to Virginia's party last night.'

' I heard him come in. Must ha' been nigh onto three o'clock.'

' I reckon so, father.'

Mental effort bore hard on Jane Dodd. It made her worried. Up to the present, life had flowed on in calmness and peace. John had never made her and father one bit of trouble, not a mite. A steady-going young man was John, you knew where to find him. Not like that Jacques Dufour, wild as a hawk. Education hadn't spoiled their John. She hoped he was ready to settle down with them and carry on here at Bell Inn as his

people had done for a hundred and fifty years. In spite of these optimistic sentiments, Mrs. Dodd was conscious of a slight doubt about her steady-going son. There was something in the air, something new and startling, not easily comprehended. She had felt this way sometimes when a thunder shower swept over the hills, even though the sky was blue and the sun was shining.

'Here comes John now, Hester. Better see that the eggs are cooked the way he likes 'em. An' he wants the bacon nice an' crisp.'

The parents watched their son's progress through the dining-room. Tall, fair of hair and face, a lithe, athletic figure attained by vigorous exercise, Jack Dodd was a credit to the Dodds. Good blood had been in his ancestry, honest, God-fearing folk, who dealt justly with their neighbours and yet were shrewd enough to watch the pennies and lay up for themselves a goodly treasure upon earth, not neglecting to provide for treasure in that future life in which they firmly believed. They gave willingly, even generously to the poor, to the Church which they loved, to the missionary cause at home and abroad. John Dodd had gone further than his fathers. He sent Jack to Harvard, the first of the Dodds to have higher education, and he was not sorry. Present times demanded more than the old days. Here at Bell Inn Jack would meet all types of people. He would have the advantage of meeting them on equal ground.

He and his wife exchanged glances as Jack stopped at the tables where some of the guests were seated, bowed, smiled, and made light conversation. In his sport suit of grey tweed, long golf socks and white shoes, John Dodd was presentable, decidedly presentable. The same thought was in the mind of his father and mother—'What a popular host he will make for Bell Inn!'

John Dodd had finished his breakfast. Having forgotten in the pleasure of the moment his irritation because Jack had roused him at three o'clock in the morning, his mood was

amiable. Pushing back his chair, he crossed one leg over the other. He was prepared to talk, rather an unusual condition with John Dodd, a man of few words.

‘How’d the party go off?’

John nodded to Hester, bringing eggs and bacon, and accepted a cup of coffee from his mother before he replied.

‘Oh, all right. Lots of people there. You ought to have gone, Hester.’

‘Did Hester have an invitation?’ asked his mother quickly.

‘Yes, she did. Virginia asked about you, Hester.’

‘I wrote her a note. She was kind to invite me, Mrs. Dodd, but I didn’t want to go.’

‘I suppose she didn’t have any nice dress,’ said Mrs. Dodd, as Hester disappeared in the pantry.

Jack laughed. ‘Got worked up over something. Spunky.’

‘She’s never spoke sharp or saucy to me since she’s been here.’

‘Guess you don’t know Hester’s thoughts, mother. In fact,’ he added slowly, ‘sometimes I think you and father don’t know much about us young folks.’

Suddenly Mrs. Dodd remembered what had troubled her while she was moulding the loaves.

‘John, Helene Stewart told her mother that there was drinkin’ at the party.’

Jack cast a scornful look in the direction of Helene Stewart, languidly eating breakfast.

‘She would tell,’ he remarked contemptuously.

John Dodd moved his heavy body forward.

‘Was it true? Was there drinkin’ at Lawrence’s? I’m surprised that he allowed it.’

‘He wasn’t there. Didn’t know about it, probably.’

‘Wasn’t there? At Virginia’s party?’

‘No, mother.’

Could it be possible that there was a gleam of amusement in his eyes, a laughing twist to his mouth as he replied. This was

no laughing matter. It was serious. Mrs. Dodd had read about girls having parties without the presence of their parents. Not Virginia; she would never disregard the proper thing to do.

'Mrs. Mather, Virginia's aunt, was present, of course.'

'She and Mr. Lawrence were both there when we went in. But they disappeared. Mrs. Mather went off in the car. I don't know what became of Mr. Lawrence; didn't see him again. But Tom New and his wife were there and several other young married folks.'

Mrs. Dodd sniffed. 'Just as bad as the younger ones.'

'Do you mean to say,' asked his father, 'that Lawrence provided liquor for you boys and girls to drink?'

'We're not boys and girls, father, we're men and women. We know what we're doing, and how to take care of ourselves. Don't have to be watched by our relatives.'

'Father oughtn't to excite him,' worried Jane Dodd. 'He didn't get much sleep, comin' in so late.'

Every one had left the dining-room now. Joe was clearing off the tables.

'If Lawrence served liquor at his daughter's party, I'll have him arrested.'

'Oh, he didn't, father.' Jack pushed back his chair. It scraped harshly on the bare floor. 'Maybe you can't understand. The fellows brought it and in some cases, the girls had their flasks. It wasn't Mr. Lawrence's fault at all. He wasn't responsible, didn't know about it. Probably does by this time. Plenty of folks will tell him; maybe Gray will.'

'He should have stayed to see what went on.'

Jack laughed, actually laughed aloud. His mother shivered. This was very real and very terrible to her. Even the word 'liquor' frightened her. And connecting it with Virginia Lawrence, and Gray, young John's room-mate, and her own son! Jane Dodd felt as if she must flee for refuge somewhere, get away from this octopus, drink, stretching out its deadly

grasping tentacles to seize the children of such decent folk.

'He wouldn't have enjoyed himself much,' said Jack.

'You mean that these carryings on would have continued just the same?'

'Yes, father.' Jack spoke quietly. The idea that his parents were genuinely shocked and alarmed by something to which he had become accustomed, made him pause to think. 'You see, those people, except a very few, who were there last night, don't think there's anything wrong.'

'Nothing wrong! It's against the law.'

'They don't bother about that. Some of them do it just because it is forbidden. That's the way they look at it.'

'Helene Stewart says that Jacques Dufour was drunk,' Mrs. Dodd said. 'Did you know it?'

They were all standing now, Jack an inch taller than his father.

'I ought to. Brought him home.' Jack frowned.

There was a long pause. No one moved. His mother laid her hand on the grey tweed sleeve. Her eyes were pleading, tender.

'John, dear. You don't drink, do you? It—it would kill me.'

Jack's father said not a word. On his lined face was an expression of intense fear, waiting for the answer. Jack stooped and kissed his mother.

'Don't you worry one bit about me, mother. I don't like the stuff. Never did. I don't say—I want to be honest with you—that I'd see anything particularly wrong in taking a cocktail if it agreed with me. You know this is a day when we think for ourselves, we young folks, we don't accept our parents' judgement; but it doesn't agree with me, and I don't take it. Besides, I like to keep a clear head.'

The question of right or wrong evidently does not enter into it, thought his father. He was dazed. All this unrest had come, for the first time, close home to him.

'Father,' said Jack, his face turning pale, 'could I have a talk with you?'

'How about two o'clock, John?'

'Suits me all right.'

The father and mother were left alone. Never inclined to carry burdens, Jane Dodd had cast off hers. John, at any rate, wasn't like the rest. She was surprised, however, at Virginia's inviting such a lawless crowd.

'He wants to talk to you! Father, do you think it could be that he's fixed things up with Virginia? That they're engaged?'

'Don't know, Jane.'

John Dodd went into his office and shut the door. Sitting down by the mahogany desk, he leaned his head on his hand. The revelations made in such a casual manner by his son had opened a new vista of life. The young people were thinking for themselves, making their own laws—or acknowledging no law, which was worse—they were determined to do as they pleased. He began to fear the conversation with John. 'You treat us as if we were boys and girls; we are men and women, with a right to think for ourselves, to go to the devil if we please.' He heard their clear young voices, Virginia and Gray, John, his son, Jacques, the ne'er do well, even Hester, the waitress, and a great army of youth marching by, heads in the air, faces eager, restless, longing to know, pressing forward. An army of youth! John Dodd bent his head still lower. In this emergency, when his soul was moved within him by the need of the present day, he prayed as he had never done before.

'Oh, God, come in Thy power, Thy mighty power! Be the leader of this mighty host, marching forward through these years, either to victory or disaster.'

Jack was troubled; the day had not begun well. It was not altogether his conversation with his parents at breakfast which upset him; long ago he had come to the conclusion that he, in common with the others of his generation, could not meet them

on a basis of mutual agreement. It was useless to try. They simply could not understand, because they looked at moral questions, at the whole problem of life from a totally different angle. A fellow had to do what he pleased, what he thought best in the light of modern illuminations, so much more brilliant than anything preceding this century. Bringing up that affair of Jacques, last night, was disturbing, however. Funny how quickly things get around. Of course, Helene Stewart had to tell everything, she had no sense of loyalty to her class.

Jack stepped on the big grey cat, begged its pardon politely, picked it up, and went to sit on a porch chair far removed from the ladies with their knitting and embroidery, heads close together, gathered in a group near the door of Bell Inn. The cat settled itself comfortably, began to purr and stared at Jack with its slits of green eyes.

'Yes, Felix, they're a batch of old tabbies, you know the kind. Softly padding around and picking up gossip. Why can't they let us alone, to live our lives? We don't interfere with them. No doubt, at this moment they're pulling poor Virginia's party all to pieces. Analysing Jacques, too.'

That brought back the whole thing. He wished that he hadn't taken Jacques home. It would have served him right if he had to sleep out under the skies. No business to get himself in such a state, but it took mighty little to bowl Jacques over. That's the way with these temperamental people. They couldn't stand anything. John Dodd, fifth, seated upon his ancestral property absently smoothed Felix, who went to sleep after the manner of cats.

Madame Dufour had been up—at half past two in the morning. She opened the door and he had helped Jacques upstairs, taken off his clothes, and put him to bed. When he came down, Madame Dufour was waiting.

'Thank you, John,' was all she said.

But how she did look! Lonely, sad, disheartened.

'Get down, Felix.'

Dropping the indignant animal on the floor, Jack stood up, looking out at the fair scene around him. Lately, his father never asked him to do any real work. His time was his own, to take Virginia for long rides, placid, silent Virginia, to play tennis or go to Burlington for a show. He knew why. Father thought that everything was settled, that Jack would take up life here at Bell Inn; later he would move into the Dufour Place with Virginia—the old man had a kind heart beneath its rough shell, he couldn't bring himself to dispossess Madame Dufour. Jack liked that in father. What would John Dodd say when his son told him that he intended to do none of these things?

'They take us too seriously,' he muttered. 'Madame Dufour grieves over Jacques' weaknesses. Why can't she just stand off and let him go his own way? It would be far easier for her and him. If he is bound to ruin his life, it's his own affair, according to our way of thinking.'

Was it? Didn't every one's life touch others' lives? It oughtn't to be so. Jacques was an individual, so was he, so was Hester—his eye fell on her. Having finished her share in the morning work, she came out to enjoy the fresh air. Next week she would be leaving Bell Inn, going to Pepper Tree Ranch, to her cousin. She exulted in the prospect, of which she had not told one soul. Nobody there cared what she did, anyway.

'Hello, Hester!' Jack was glad to get away from his unpleasant thoughts. 'Haven't seen much of you lately.'

'I've been right here,' she answered, tilting her head saucily and smiling.

'And I've been—occupied.'

'Yes.'

'Why didn't you go to Virginia's party? You were silly to get so excited about the invitation. How would she know about you if I didn't tell her?'

' How indeed. I guess I didn't miss much by not going, according to reports. Yes, Mrs. Dodd, I'm coming.'

Jack groaned. So it had got around to Hester.

At one-thirty, he carefully arranged his hair and brushed his clothes, straightened his shoulders and looked at himself in the glass, nodding at the reflection.

' Take courage, my boy. Father doesn't bite.'

Opening the door into the office, he stood for a moment looking around at familiar surroundings, impressing them on his mind.

He wanted to think of father sitting here, when he was far, far away. He choked a little and cleared his throat. The mahogany desk—Jack remembered seeing his grandfather sit there; the worn, leather chair; the day's record of expenses; branches of the elm-tree tapping on the window; sunlight flecking the bare floor. Father came in, tall, strong, a man of fifty, a man of power and influence. Jack had been proud of father when he came twice to see him at Cambridge. He brought the other fellows up to meet him.

After all, Jack thought later, a mountain becomes a molehill if you walk up to it. Almost, he had wished that his task had been more difficult, a real contest of wills sharpens the wits. There had been no contest at all. Father was apparently prepared. How did that happen? Could it be that fathers—a former generation—had some understanding of their sons? It was a new idea.

' I've decided,' he began, ' that I can't stay at Bell Inn, father it's too narrow for me. I must live my own life, follow my own light. I've got to go away.'

John Dodd's son was a little taller than he. Their features were alike, broad foreheads, full mouths with mobile lips, eyes which could be very piercing, but were ordinarily gentle and kind, rather large noses, the Dodd nose, broad in the nostrils, a bit thick at the bridge, the nose of a capable administrator.

John Dodd's eyes were very kind now. He put his hand on Jack's shoulder as they stood side by side. 'Whither does your own light lead you, son?'

There was no irony in his tone; rather, deep interest and affection. A stranger would not have surmised that this hour in the office of Bell Inn tolled the knell of John Dodd's lifelong hopes, of his family pride. John Dodd was a strong man.

'I've got a job under Hobson and Steele, of Boston. I want to be a civil engineer and I can work my way through Tech.'

'What about Virginia?'

'There isn't a thing in that, father. We're just good friends, Virginia, Gray, and I.'

'When do you want to go, John?'

'I'm due at Hobson's after Labour Day.'

'You'd better tell your mother. Be—be careful how you do it, son. She's not very well these days, heart's a bit bad, and she's kind of set on having Virginia in the family.'

John Dodd tried to speak lightly.

'Yes, sir. I'll do that.'

'If you need money, John, you know that you have only to ask.' Something smarted in Jack's eyes.

This was father; maybe he was the one who had not understood father, while he thought it was the other way round.

'I can earn. You know, dad'—the old boyish name—'things aren't the same with us. We're young. We must see life for ourselves, work out our own problems, fight our own battles. You do see, don't you?'

He did so want father to see. It would be a bond between them, one of iron which could never be broken. His voice was eager. It sounded to the older man's ears pathetic, and vibrant with the spirit of youth. In that moment, there came to John Dodd a new conception of the present generation, of its greatness, its aspirations, its promise for the future—and its weaknesses.

'Son, I see and understand. Go your own way, depend on

God for help, call upon me in case of need, and work out your own problems.'

Jack went away without replying.

John Dodd sat down in the worn leather chair, rested his elbow on the old mahogany desk and his head upon his hand. The blow was not unexpected, he had observed John closely during the past week, had felt the tension in the air, but it had been hard to bear.

Jane, his wife, spread her husband's nightshirt on the bed. She pulled out the sleeves carefully. Every night she did this, but not so slowly.

'Don't you think, father, that you was too easy with John? In our day—'

John Dodd's smile was forced and decidedly grim. He pulled off one shoe, looked into it with an expectant air, and said, 'This ain't our day, Jane.'

'You give in to him, John. He'd ha' stayed if you'd told him he must.'

Mr. Dodd dropped the shoe on the floor with a bang.

'I didn't really give in to him. I kept him. Do you know what would have happened if I'd put my foot down? He might have yielded or he might have left for good. In either case we'd ha' lost him, Jane, for ever. I'm beginning to understand this generation—at least I'm trying to. They're like that mule my father had, you remember, Mike. Let him go his own gait, gently guiding, an' you wouldn't have a mite o' trouble. But try to boss him an' there'd be the old Harry to pay.'

Mr. Dodd dropped the second shoe and proceeded to clothe himself in the nightshirt, plenty, large, and falling to his ankles. He scoffed at young Jack's pyjamas. He even had a set of silk ones with pink stripes.

As he knelt down by the side of the bed to say his prayers, a habit of his life, he turned his head and looked at his wife.

'We ain't lost John, mother. Thank God!'

VII

CALLING! CALLING!

THAT night Madame Dufour died in her sleep. The old woman who brought her a cup of tea every morning, found her lying on her bed, a faint smile on her lips. The Dufour Place would now pass into John Dodd's hands, everybody said, for, of course, that shiftless Jacques couldn't pay the mortgage. Young John and Virginia Lawrence could settle down there nicely.

Jacques, left alone, walked around the unkept garden after his mother's funeral. He set straight in its place a marble cupid holding a cornucopia of flowers through which water used to flow into a basin filled with gold-fish. His father had brought the cupid from Italy, with some statues and paintings of considerable value. These his mother had never been willing to sell, even though they were in debt.

The garden had been beautiful when he, Jacques, was a boy, and his father was alive. Now it was a mass of rose-vines, cheerily blossoming wherever they happened to be, of rough grass and ragged shrubs. After his father's death, money had melted away. Madame Dufour knew nothing about finance; Jacques cared nothing.

Amidst the ruin, looking upon the turreted, miniature château, copied from that home of brave chevaliers in France, on the banks of the River Loire, Jacques suddenly realized that he loved this home very dearly. He could not, would not, give it up to any one. Strange that he had not felt this grip of home on his soul, on his body, at any time during the two years of his wanderings. For months together, he had not written even a postcard to his mother waiting here so patiently among

the shadows of a happy past. Something had possessed him. What was it? All this nonsense of evil and good, of spiritual influences and an eternal life had never interested him. To-day was all that mattered. Mother was gone, had dropped out of life in her sleep. Where was she? With all his professed agnosticism, he could not think of mother as dead, utterly vanished.

In the course of those two years, Jacques had spent some time in Bonn, a city of villas and rose-gardens on the border of the classic river Rhine. A great university was at Bonn. Jacques made friends with the students, strong young fellows with half-healed scars on cheek and forehead, remnants of duels fought, a mediaeval custom. There were revels by night. The quiet burghers were aroused by maudlin shrieks and fiendish laughter, in which Jacques had done his part.

One day a wagon loaded with pottery passed into the market-place. Closer inspection proved the pottery to be beer-mugs of a deep blue colour, decorated with flower designs and pictures. They pleased Jacques and he bought one. Holding more than a quart, it would be suitable to pass around when a group of his friends gathered in his room—a sort of loving-cup. He smiled grimly, recalling the letters on this huge beer-mug, beneath a picture.

‘Ess und trink,
Sei fröhlich Hier auf Erde.
Denk’ nur dass es nicht besser wird.’

He repeated the words: Eat and drink; enjoy life; don’t think that it will ever be better.

Jacques had followed that injunction to the letter, with the consequent result that he stood in this abandoned garden, poor, alone, no prospects for the present, faint hope for the future.

Somewhere he had read, ‘eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow ye die.’ ‘Thou fool, this night, thy soul shall be required of thee.’ Thy soul! Had he a soul? Who would

require it? God? Jacques laughed. God! There was no God.

Restless and unhappy, he went into the house. Old Dodd practically owned it now. He had treated mother quite considerately. Jacques knew that he himself deserved no consideration and would be given short shift by the proprietor of Bell Inn. How he hated to give this up, the only place on the wide earth where he could take refuge when the storms of life beat fiercely upon him! Until to-day he had not realized the storms; it had seemed as if roses would bloom always and sunshine prevail.

To-day happened to be his birthday. He was thirty-two years old. After this, he was going down hill, forty would follow, fifty—one began to be old. John Dodd was fifty. Jacques saw him coming through the garden now, up the steps of the marble-flagged terrace, through the open doorway into the big square hall, with its French windows opening on the side lawn. John Dodd was coming to take the house away from him.

Jacque's cheeks blanched, his heart fluttered nervously. High-strung, physically exhausted by too much revelry by night and day, he had still control over himself, he was a son of the chevaliers of France. They had been brave men.

'Good morning, Mr. Dodd.'

'Good morning, Jacques.'

The two men shook hands.

Jacques led the way into the long, low drawing-room.

'Sit down, sir. No, not in that chair,' he laughed, excitedly.
'It's very old and likely to let you down.'

Mr. Dodd smiled, seating himself on a sofa completely covered with needle-point tapestry. It had been brought from France, from the original château, *un objet d'art*, very old, but still strong. John Dodd came to the point at once. This was not intended to be a social call, but his kind blue eyes rested on Jacques with something of sympathy, also bewilderment. A fine figure of a lad. What a pity that he should be so worthless.

'Are you able to pay the mortgage on this property? Back interest is due. Since your father died I have received nothing. I asked your mother to make even a small payment; she said that she could not. Lately, I have not wanted to trouble her, she was so frail—and you were away.'

'You have been very patient, Mr. Dodd. I was going to see you before I left, to thank you. I suppose that this is yours now, unless—'

'Is there no way for you to keep it?'

Mr. Dodd had not meant to say that, nothing had been further from his thought. He had desired this fine old Dufour Place for young John and Virginia. He was not a man to relinquish his plans and even John's ultimatum had not caused him to give up hope. Young people's fancies were like the poplar leaves, tossing about when the light breeze kissed them. It was only right that he should make an offer to Jacques. Of course, there was no way.

The silence that followed was broken only by the thud of a falling apple in the orchard, by the radiant flight of a hummingbird, seeking honey in the heart of a scarlet trumpet on the vine by the window. It was a long silence and it made Mr. Dodd very uncomfortable. He was not accustomed to artistic, temperamental folks. Jacques' white face, his twisting fingers, never still, the darkened, lonely room, with its ancient furniture and family portraits, got on John Dodd's nerves. He moved, uneasily, and the sofa creaked.

This sound aroused Jacques. He spoke rapidly, in a new, sharp tone.

'See that tapestry between the two windows, Mr. Dodd? It's real and it's old. We've never wanted to sell anything—we love these paintings and ornaments. I'm willing to dispose of it and I know a dealer in Boston who'll buy it. I'll bring you the money for all back interest, with interest on that, and can, perhaps, pay something on the mortgage. There are pieces of

old silver, perhaps some embroideries. I've decided to keep the property, Mr. Dodd.'

John Dodd's disappointment did not show in his appearance. He rose.

'That's quite satisfactory, Jacques. I don't blame you for wanting to keep it.'

'It has belonged to my family, sir.'

'You look like your grandfather.' Mr. Dodd nodded at one of the dark old paintings.

'Chevalier Jacques Marie Guillaume Victor Dufour,' rolled off Jacques' glib tongue, as if he were presenting Mine Host of Bell Inn to his grandfather.

'Had a lot of names in those days, didn't they?'

'I have four myself,' said Jacques, smiling.

His heart was singing. The home was his. Suddenly, he realized that he was actually a man, with a place in the world, a name to carry on. It gave him a new feeling of responsibility for himself and those who had preceded and might follow him.

'Guess there's something in the rascal after all,' thought shrewd John Dodd.

Rarely did he act on the impulse of the moment; the Dodds were cautious men, slow to move, mentally or physically. He belied his ancestry now.

'I'm glad you've decided to hold on to this place,' he said, cordially and sincerely. It was the proper thing. He wished that his own son felt a little more the ties of blood, the pride of family. 'You're lonely here. Come over to supper to-night.'

'I'll do it, sir. Be glad to. And thank you.'

'Jane won't like it,' mused Mr. Dodd, walking toward Bell Inn. 'She's pretty well cut up over John's going away and she hasn't any opinion of Jacques Dufour. Maybe I oughtn't to ha' done that.'

'He looked so sort of lonesome over in that big house. I thought I'd better ask him, Jane,' he explained, having a

knowledge of his wife's tender spot. 'He's going to sell some o' them art things he's got around; Madame Dufour wouldn't consider it, she'd rather owe me money.' He could afford to chuckle over it now that he was going to bank all that back interest and interest on that, too. Lots of young fellows wouldn't have thought about the extra. Showed Jacques had some business sense.

'An' keep the property?'

'Yes.'

For some reason Jane Dodd was pleased. Women were certainly queer things. When you expected they'd fly up in the air, they didn't. And then again . . .

'You can put the best silver on to-night, Hester. We're goin' to have company. Better get some fresh flowers, too. And, Hester, open one o' them glasses of blackberry jelly.'

'Wonder who is coming,' thought Hester, bringing in a long platter of fricasseed chicken, rich cream gravy softening the biscuits encircling it. She had presence of mind enough to support the platter; when she saw Jacques standing behind Mrs. Dodd, holding her chair, her hands shook. Since that afternoon when he played his violin by the trout-pool and said such extraordinary things, she had not seen him.

'Good evening,' he said, courteously.

Mr. and Mrs. Dodd, Jacques and young John sat down. John Dodd began to serve out the chicken.

'Light and dark, Jacques?'

'If you please, Mr. Dodd.'

Jacques marvelled. No longer was he the rascal, the vagabond. In the twinkling of an eye, through the medium of an old tapestry—strange he'd not thought of this expedient until the moment when Mr. Dodd brought things to a point!—he had become a man, a householder, accepted here as an equal. Jacques sat up very straight, held his head high and resembled his grandfather more than ever.

'Goin' to live on the old place?' inquired Mrs. Dodd, pouring coffee. 'You used to take lots of cream, didn't you?' She remembered those old days, when Jack used to bring him in for dinner.

'No, Mrs. Dodd. I want to let it.'

'You don't say!'

Jack's eyes twinkled. Mother did love to know about everything. His father smiled, too. Jane had her own reasons for being so willing to have Jacques as a guest. He spoke.

'The house is in bad repair. It will cost a great deal to put it in condition for renting.'

'I know, sir. A lot of things will have to be sold. There's no other way.'

'If you rent,' broke in Jane Dodd's eager voice, 'you can't live there.'

It was Jacques' turn to smile. He knew Mrs. Dodd's peculiarities. She and his mother lived near each other for many years, but never once had Madame Dufour asked her to enter the iron gates. Mrs. Dodd had resented this.

'Would it be convenient for you to come over with Mr. Dodd some day soon and look at the house? With your experience, you could tell me what ought to be done.'

The conquest was complete. John Dodd was convinced that while Jacques was a fool about music and a wandering gipsy by nature—sort of queer—he had wit enough to take mother on her weak side. Unless his wild nature got the better of him, Jacques would make a man yet.

Hester caught enough of the conversation to give her an idea of what was going on. From the kitchen window, she saw Jacques and young John saunter away toward the Dufour Place. This was Saturday, Monday would be Labour Day. She'd promised Mrs. Dodd to stay till Wednesday, to help straighten up the dining-room. Most of the guests would leave on Tuesday.

Through these last weeks, Hester had hugged her pleasant

secret. Who cared for her at Bell Inn? Nobody. Mr. and Mrs. Dodd employed her, paid so much money for so much service, and she had done her best to keep her part of the bargain. Was just the waitress. Jack had been friendly in his agreeable, boyish way until Virginia Lawrence appeared. Immediately, she was relegated to her proper place. He nodded to her and said 'Good morning,' or 'Good evening,' as the case might be, giving her to understand that she did not belong in his set. No, that was not fair to Jack. He asked Virginia to send her an invitation to her party, and she, Hester Euwer, a niece of Hugh Euwer, Baronet, daughter of Major Hugh Euwer, of the Canadian Light Horse, had, in a very ill-bred manner, torn it up and thrown the pieces in his face.

With cheeks burning at the remembrance of her action, Hester went out on the rear veranda, opening from the dining-room. The view was charming, range on range of hills. A stream ran like a silver ribbon, twisting among green verdure, turning black as darkness fell. A great yellow moon, the September moon, was rising, thrusting its crescent over the hills. Over yonder was the trout-pool.

Hester's heart hardened when she thought of Jacques. He had played divinely. Music always moved her. When she and dad had sat in Carnegie Hall listening to the playing of symphony orchestras, the power of Beethoven, the beauty of Mozart, the lightness and joy of Haydn, had inspired her; she wanted to live more nobly, to reach upward to something more beautiful than this earth. But when Jacques drew his bow over his violin, she experienced a feeling quite different. Could music influence for good or evil? Jacques had said that she would understand, had recognized her light footfall before he saw her face. What bond could there be between her and this young man? It was a good thing that she was going away from here. You would imagine that at quiet Bell Inn, set in the midst of Vermont hills, you could be out of the currents of life.

'It's not so,' thought Hester, leaning on the railing. 'There's love and hate, greed and desire, passion, hope, patience, everything in this little circle. I suppose that truth and peace and—holiness are here too. Holiness—I wonder what it is. Perhaps—it's exactly the opposite to that feeling which Jacques put into my heart when he played so exquisitely. It was his own composition; the music was a part of himself, of his soul. Is his soul black? He said I understood, that I had a "little devil" in me. Am I like him?'

Suddenly, Hester was afraid. Grim terror took hold of her. Alone, she seemed to be, in an immense universe; alone, with the powers of evil surging around her. Were they within her, also?

In the chapel at Smith College she had heard a man preach a sermon which she had never forgotten. He was a great man—she had forgotten his name—so great that he spoke very simply, a child could have comprehended. 'The Kingdom of God is within you' was the basis of his talk. 'Within you.' If only someone would tell her more about this Kingdom of God which dwelt in the human soul.

Hester's thoughts had wandered far. Hark! What was that faint melody? The blood rushed to her cheeks; she hid her face in her hands. It was drawing her, drawing her—. Running through the empty dining-room into the hall, she looked at great-grandfather's clock. 'It's only nine. Mr. Dodd doesn't close up before eleven,' she muttered.

'Going out, Hester?' called Mrs. Dodd, as she passed across the front porch.

'For a little walk.'

'It's a nice night.'

The strains of music grew louder as each step took her nearer the pool where lacy ferns and soft mosses, dancing moonbeams and warm breezes, wavering shadows and the scents of new-mown grass and autumn blossoms awaited her.

And Jacques Dufour was playing his violin, calling, calling.

VIII

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

A PPARENTLY Jacques did not observe Hester, coming through the moonlight. He was sitting by a tree, drawing his bow across the strings of his old instrument, playing softly. This was no heartrending music of red Russia. Fairies were dancing in a ring among green ferns. They wore flimsy gowns of rainbow tints, and their wings fluttered; fairy laughter seemed to fill the evening air as she dropped down upon the moss. Daintily tripping, the tiny figures ran to her, encircling her with magic, breathing sweet words in her ears, throwing flowers over her until the fragrance almost suffocated her, until she was intoxicated with beauty and sound and laughter.

Blindly she stretched out her hands, to seek something tangible which she could grasp, trying to break the garlands of flowers which bound her, to escape from a net, fragile as the web woven by the spider on the summer grass, yet strong as cables of iron. It was holding her——

‘ Oh, do stop ! ’ she cried.

Jacques broke off with a harsh, dissonant chord, and laid down the violin.

Hester laughed, nervously, sharply. The fairies were gone, the colours had faded, the web was broken.

‘ Don’t like the music ? ’ Jacques asked, carelessly.

There was no greeting between them.

‘ Yes, I like it.’

‘ What’s the matter, then ? ’

His tone was so normal that it calmed her tense nerves.

' You oughtn't to play that way.'

' What way?' He took up the instrument again and thrummed upon it as if it were a guitar, a monotonous tom-tom, a steady beating as of drums on a lonely desert. Hester put her hands over her ears.

' That's worse yet. I can't stand it.'

Again Jacques put his violin into the battered case.

' Seems to me that your nerves aren't any too steady. Heat must have got you. Maybe you work too hard. What did you ever take that kind of a job for? '

' Because I needed it. A girl who must earn her living accepts anything that offers.'

She had talked with Jacques Dufour only once before, and here she was telling him things that she could not have told Jack Dodd. It was uncanny.

' I'd better go.'

She rose, unsteadily, wanting very much to stay.

Jacques did not move. In the moonlight his face looked very white, his hair, drooping over his forehead—it was never cut short as Jack's was—and his eyes, brilliant under firmly outlined eyebrows, were very black.

' Why go?' he drawled. ' It's a nice night for a talk. We haven't had much chance to get acquainted. You were always so busy, and then mother——' He paused. ' Can't you stay a little while? You see, I've been away so much that I don't know people around here and they do not like me. Can't blame them for it, I'm not a good sort. That day we met here, I—won't you sit down again? It isn't late.'

Hester sat down. Of course, the man was lonely. He was not to blame because his music affected her. Temperamental, he was. For the first time, it occurred to her that she was temperamental, too. What did people do to overcome temperament? If that was all, she didn't need to worry because the music brought out new and indescribable feelings.

Temperamental people were queer. All she needed to do was to keep away from others who were of the same type. Better not stay here long. Inspired by this common-sense decision, she proceeded to do just the opposite.

Jacques' fingers itched for his violin, but he resolutely left it in repose, patting the case affectionately as if it contained all that he loved. Undoubtedly, exactly the case.

'I seem to have known you for a long time, Hester. Queer, isn't it? Sometimes you come across a man or woman who affects you that way. Previous existence, maybe. There are lots of things we don't know. The music makes clear some puzzling problems, but not all.'

Hester made no reply.

'There's the question of an Almighty power, a Creator.' Jacques was communing with himself. 'No doubt, we all have good and evil in us. I'm mostly evil.'

Hester agreed so thoroughly in this opinion that she remained silent.

'Yet, since the beginning of history there's always been the idea of a sacrifice, of somebody who bore the sins of others. In the Old Testament—you needn't stare, I've read the Bible, because I'm honestly seeking for Truth; we all are. You and Jack and the rest of our kind to-day, we're all seeking. Not in the old way; we belong to a new generation, don't look at things as our fathers did. We want to know, to find out for ourselves. As soon as we think we've got the truth, through science, through art, through music, or the minds of dreamers, we're stopped by a wall which we can't penetrate. That isn't the way out. You understand, don't you?'

'Yes,' answered Hester.

She was in a state of amazement. Jacques Dufour, the wanderer, the unbeliever and scoffer, the profligate (he was all these) talking like this! Certain it was that this generation was seeking for truth. It had been so in college. Questions of

origin, of theology, or religion, spiritual life had been discussed. The men and women of to-day wanted to know, wanted to reason things out.

'In the Old Testament there was sacrifice, atonement for sin. Then Christ came. They say He made atonement. What a fool I am to talk to you this way! I'm a fellow who lives alone, in the open. I've talked to plenty of girls, but not this way. You heard that I'm keeping the house?'

'I judged so from what was said at supper.'

'Mother loved it. As soon as it's rented I'm going away. If I'd sell my violin, I could pay off that mortgage. But I won't. Not ever. You're leaving soon too, aren't you, Hester?'

'On Wednesday.'

'You don't want to tell me where you'll be?'

'No.'

'I'll find you, somewhere.'

He took the violin and raised it to his shoulder. Perhaps it was in Jacques Dufour's power to arouse both evil and good in the hearts of human beings. Now Hester rose on wings above the earth, her spirit was free, toward heaven she floated. Angels, pure and spotless, were around her, singing. What was it the angels were singing? 'The kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto our God, the Lord.'

Queer how things heard long ago come to one's mind!

Jacques stood up.

'Time for you to go, Hester.'

'Good night, Jacques.'

'Why did you come, Hester?'

'I heard the music——'

'Calling you. Will you come whenever it calls?'

Hester did not answer. She was already gone.

In the tower-room, the whole incident lost any significance.

He was a strange man, very strange. He knew more about the Bible than she did. Imagine this—Jacques Dufour! Her nerves must have been on edge to-night, everything had been mysterious. Moonlight and music play tricks. Hester yawned.

'I'm glad that I did not tell him or anybody where I'm going. And I hope—I hope that I'll never see Jacques Dufour again.'

It had been a weird, uncomfortable evening.

'I'm going where he can never find me,' was her last thought before dropping off into a dreamless sleep.

During the next three days there was no time for thinking of mysterious influences of music, of shadowy woods or a starry firmament. Labour Day and its crowds drove Jacques Dufour, with his peculiar, puzzling personality, entirely out of Hester's mind. One cannot be romantic when odours of cooking are prevalent, when the weather is scorching hot and trays are heavy.

Not until Tuesday did Hester find a minute to pack her few clothes in an old trunk which Dad used to carry with him in his campaigning. She had no regret in leaving Bell Inn. Probably she would not meet any of these people again. With each dress folded and packed, her spirits rose. A new life lay before her; adventure in the far West. She sang as she packed. When her belongings were in the trunk, her mother's miniature, her father's latest photograph, his hair was just beginning to grow grey and his cheeks thin, Hester put down the lid.

'I've left my sweater downstairs. That ought to go in. If I don't get it now, I'll forget it in the morning.'

She found the pink sweater on a chair.

Mrs. Dodd called her into the private family sitting-room. She and her husband were resting after the day's work. They looked tired and worn. John's leaving them was hard, too.

'Come in, my dear, and rest awhile. You've been a great help, Hester. It's been pleasant to have you with us.'

Suddenly, Hester felt that she would like to stay here at

Bell Inn. They were kind, these two people. It was safe, a refuge. The unknown cousin, the ranch in a strange part of the country, became fearsome. Her voice was not steady when she replied.

'Thank you, Mrs. Dodd. You've been good to me.'

'You're not like other girls we've had. Different sort of. Not wanting to gad around with every fellow who came along, steady goin'.'

'Maybe you'll return to us next summer,' said John Dodd in his deep voice.

'I can't, sir.'

'You said you hadn't any folks, I think,' went on Mrs. Dodd. 'I ain't talked to father about this, but I been thinkin' that you might want to stay with us awhile, if you ain't got a job in prospect. It's nice here in the winter an' not much to do. I'd be glad o' company, and father and I would take you to Burlington sometimes. Young folks have to have some fun.'

How good they were, how kind!

'You know, dear, John ain't goin' to stay here. He feels he can't. You'd be a sort of daughter to us an' we'd treat you that way.'

John Dodd nodded approvingly. It was like Jane to think this plan up. A good idea.

'You ain't got any folks,' Mrs. Dodd pursued, in her even tones.

Should she tell them about Uncle Leonard? It was hardly fair to allow them to give her pity and love under the false pretension of being without friends.

Into her mind came a vision of Jacques Dufour, his eyes, his music. Did she want Jacques to know where she was going? To follow her? If she told these dear people offering her a home where she was going, young John would know—could inform Jacques. No, it must not be.

In a few grateful words she explained. There were other

plans already made, she was sorry, truly sorry. She kissed Mrs. Dodd, who cried a little. In the past few days, she had set her mind on Hester's staying.

'Never mind, it's all right. You'll come back to see us sometimes. And you'll drop us a card.'

'From New York,' answered Hester.

'John will drive you to Burlington in time to catch the New York express,' John Dodd said. 'And here's a cheque for you.'

'It's too much, Mr. Dodd, ten dollars too much. I can't.'

'You'll need clothes,' put in Mrs. Dodd.

'To think that they were like this all the time and I thought them hard and money-getting!' mused Hester, having pressed her sweater into the already closely-packed trunk. She had to work hard to lock it. That done, she went to the window, the south window, to look once more at the view she loved. From there, she could see the lights in the windows of the Dufour house. Surely the sound of the violin could not come so far! The night was still and the hour late. Certainly, she heard music. It should not call her again.

Hester slammed down the window with a bang. It was wiser not to give Mrs. Dodd any address. The New York bank would be sufficient. Thanks to Cousin Leonard, who had sent another cheque for fear that three hundred dollars might not be sufficient, she had a good-sized balance at the bank which her father had used.

It was better for her to go away from Bell Inn. Change, activity, a new life. Get far from this place so stagnant, so formal, its atmosphere of New England Puritanism, the narrow long street of Stanton, the old houses, stained and weather-beaten. Peace there might be here, of a kind; it palled on her spirit. Her mood changed suddenly.

She and young John Dodd, yes, and Jacques, could not stand the cast-iron, determined fanaticism of those who worshipped in the white church whose spire, pointing toward the sky, was

plainly visible from her window, a finger indicating the way to God. Virtue had gone out of Hester Euwer for the moment, her soul was stark and bare. In those late hours of a September day, she hastily packed her small hand-bag, undressed and went to bed, but not to sleep. A confusion of thoughts kept her mind busy. The future—the ranch—Cousin Leonard, what would he be like?—John Dodd, tall and fair as a blond Viking. There had been a few weeks when her thoughts had focussed on Jack. That was before she heard Jacques Dufour play under the trees by the trout-pool.

What was it Jacques had said. ‘ You, too, have a little devil in your heart.’ He had not said ‘ soul,’ probably didn’t believe in a spiritual side of human nature.

‘ Well, do I?’ she asked herself. ‘ There must be something or why should we live at all? Why strive and crave and suffer? I don’t know—I just don’t know. Father didn’t know, either. He went out into darkness. But mother—there’s her little Bible, all marked up. She believed in something higher and better. Why can’t I? Are all of us young folks reasoning out things and not coming to any conclusion?’

She tossed restlessly, finally got up and looked at her watch.

‘ Three o’clock. I must be up by six.’

The whirl began again when she laid down.

‘ Yes, there must be something in religion. “ A little devil.” Maybe Jacques saw deeper than others. Devils could be cast out, Christ did it.’

Rising, she fumbled in her handbag where, for an indefinable reason, she always carried her mother’s little Bible when she travelled. Some superstition was combined with this reason. Hester had the childish idea that if any danger came near her, if there was a thunder storm, or anybody got into the house unlawfully, or there was an accident to the train, she could not be harmed if she touched that Bible. Opening it at random, her glance fell on these words: ‘ Beginning to sink, he cried, saying,

Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' Hester closed the book and put it back in the bag. She switched off the light and crept into bed.

'Little faith,' that was the trouble. She hadn't a bit of faith. She didn't believe that John Dodd would accept anything that he couldn't see or touch, and she was absolutely sure that Jacques would not. Cousin Leonard evidently did have faith. It grasped the idea of heaven, an eternal life. His letters were full of this. He wasn't ashamed to write about it as if it were an everyday matter.

'I'll watch Cousin Leonard,' she resolved, 'and see if he lives up to it.'

Then she fell asleep.

Jack took her to Burlington at a mile a minute. There were no traffic cops along the woody road to stop him. Golden-rod was flaunting its glory upon the wayside, sumach glowed in deep scarlet. Leaves were already beginning to change into autumn tints. In Northern Vermont winter comes early.

'I love to go so fast,' said Hester, nestling down in a corner of the cushions.

'So do I.' Jack stepped on the gas. Farm-houses, harvested fields, woods, and hills were blurred as the car hurried by. 'Haven't seen much of you lately, Hester. Perhaps we'll meet somewhere.' He took time to glance at her. Good-looking girl. Well dressed, too.

'I like that red hat,' he said.

'Thank you kindly, good sir.'

The hats of to-day are adapted to roguish side-glances from beneath narrow brims.

'I hope we'll meet again,' he amended.

When Jack laughed, he showed perfect teeth and a dimple at the corner of his mouth which no masculine being had a right to possess. Hester, in the outspoken frankness of the present

time, told him so. The shadows of the night had disappeared. She was ready to enjoy life.

'I'm to go to Boston to study civil engineering. Father was just fine. If he'd treated me any other way I'd have bolted.'

'Of course,' Hester agreed.

Naturally, there was nothing left to do when parents objected.

'I never knew my father before. We were not pals; he isn't that kind. And he looks at lots of things in a different way from me. Well, here we are. That's the Lawrence home yonder.'

'How is Virginia?'

'All right. Pity you didn't get acquainted with her. She's a fine girl. You'd like Gray.'

'Banker's daughters and waitresses are not on the same plane.'

Hester knew that she could afford to be cynical. Sir Hugh Euwer was in the background.

'You're too hard on Virginia.'

Jack got her a seat in the chair-car. Hester had not intended to be so extravagant; she was not used to such comfort, now that father was gone. With a sigh of pleasure, she followed the porter in and settled herself in front of the window, waving good-bye to Jack. A box of chocolates, provided also by Jack, was in her lap with two of the latest magazines. Leaning her head back on the white linen covering the velvet, she smiled happily. No longer the waitress at Bell Inn; no longer the penniless, homeless girl who had to be looking for a job. She was cousin of Leonard Euwer, owner of Pepper Tree Ranch, grand-niece of a British baronet.

'And I didn't tell one single person about it. Under the circumstances, they all treated Hester the waitress as if she was a lady—as she is and always was and ever will be.'

IX

AN INTERLUDE

‘HESTER EUWER! Where did you drop from? You darling! It’s so long since we’ve met, and you haven’t written for months, you bad girl.’

‘You didn’t write to me, either, Constance.’

‘I’ve been so busy, and not very strong.’

Constance was good to look upon. Hester had always felt at Smith College as if her room-mate was an exotic, lovely flower which the least rough wind might injure. No rough wind ever had reached her. Whatever she wanted she had. When Hester became a Junior, Constance graduated, just managing to pass examinations. She was by no means intellectual, but sweet and lovely, with much practical sense beneath a frothy exterior.

It was a warm, hazy day in mid-September. A smell of smoke tainted the air of upper Park Avenue.

‘Maybe it will be pleasanter out in the garden,’ said Constance.

‘A garden! On the fifteenth floor?’

‘Yes. Isn’t it lovely? We haven’t been able to get away from New York this summer, on account of baby, nurse thinks she shouldn’t be moved even out to father’s home on Long Island. You were there once, Hetty.’

How she loved that old nickname. Hetty! Dad had called her that. And Constance; nobody else.

‘Indeed I do remember. What a good time we had by the sea.’

‘I don’t believe you’ve had many good times, lately,’ blurted out Constance. ‘You’re thin, Hetty.’

‘It hasn’t been so bad.’ A mischievous desire to shock

Constance, the petted child of fortune, drove her to add, lightly, 'I've been waitress at Bell Inn, near Burlington, Vermont.'

'Hester Euwer! Was it so bad for you, darling? Why didn't you come to me? Paul and I have so much, and father has only me and baby; nobody knows how rich he is. We'd have been glad—happy to help.'

'I couldn't have asked help.'

'Forgive me. I forgot your horrid pride. You always were that way. About that orange georgette dress. You were so silly. Bell Inn? We motored past a place called Bell Inn just before I was married. Stands on a hill, doesn't it? Isn't that where the Dufour—Oh, Paul, come here, darling! This is Hester Euwer. I've told you about her. She roomed with me for two years at Smith.'

'How do you do, Miss Euwer? Of course, I've heard of you.'

'Won't it be nice to have her visit us, Paul? We have so many things to talk over. There's the dinner to-night, too. She can take Helen's place. She had to go to Seabright.'

'What!' exclaimed Hester.

Constance stood firm. Her draperies moved lightly around her, fine feathers on a fluttering bird.

'I'm going to have my own way this time. You get in the car, it's waiting, and tell Morris where to go.'

It did not take long to pack her few belongings. Soon, she was settled in a comfortable guest-room in Constance's big apartment. Three windows, plenty of light and air, a low bed dressed in blue satin, with draperies depending from a gilt ring held by two cherubs. Easy chairs, a desk, soft rugs, and one good painting by a famous Italian artist; it was a landscape, a village set against a background of low hills. It brought back Bell Inn. She had liked her bare, low-ceiled turret-room better—yes, better than this one in the Fitz-Maurice home.

At dinner-time, Hester surveyed herself in a long mirror set

in the closet door. Lifting her skirts daintily on either side, she dipped in a low curtsey to the figure reflected. Madame Berthe, a little French dressmaker on a side street, had sold her the gown at a bargain a few hours before. Silver and blue, russet-hued curls lying softly on a white neck, lace draperies falling lower on each side of the skirt, half veiling her white silk stockings; silver slippers completed the costume.

' You're not so bad-looking, my dear,' she informed her reflection in the long mirror.

Paul Fitz-Maurice was there when Hester entered the living-room.

' So the little brown wren with scarlet on its head is transformed into the bird of Paradise,' he thought. ' Miss Hester Euwer, one of my wife's friends. Miss Virginia Lawrence. Mr. Gray Lawrence, Miss Euwer.'

So these were Constance's guests. Hester wondered whether they would recognize her. She had met them face to face only once, but had seen Gray come in and out several times. Apparently they did not.

' Beetham's late, Constance,' Paul said.

And now, enter Porter the butler, with cocktails.

Hester did not know what to do. The butler paused before her. Glancing at Virginia, she saw that she had taken a glass and set it down full. Taking a glass from the tray, she also placed hers upon a table. The entrance of the Honourable George Beetham created a diversion.

' A true Briton,' said Gray Lawrence, walking beside her to the dining-room. ' Thin as a rail, every muscle trained to its duty, a monocle set in his eye—probably wears it to bed—and the customary grunt when he speaks. On the whole, though, I like our British cousins.'

The table was round, covered with a cloth of finest damask having insets of fine lace. In the centre stood a solid silver lamp, its standard formed like a Corinthian column, with

pedestal and a cluster of acanthus leaves at the top, from which sprang six branches, each one holding a tiny wick fed by olive oil.

'After all,' Gray was saying, 'to get the full idea of beauty we must go back several centuries. Isn't that lamp exquisite? Constance brought it from Rome.'

'It's all so lovely,' Hester said. She sighed, unconsciously.

'Can't be used to this sort of thing,' decided Gray, his curiosity excited. 'Who is she, anyway? Euwer. Euwer.'

'Queer old duffer,' he remarked, nodding towards George Beetham. 'Likes to get himself all mussed up climbing around old ruins. He's going to study the cliff dwellings now. Well, everybody to his taste.'

'I'm going West next week.'

'You are. Mr. Beetham, you're likely to come on Miss Euwer among the Indians. She's leaving for our great West next week.'

The Honourable George Beetham adjusted his monocle and contemplated Miss Euwer. The results appeared to be satisfactory. For an 'old duffer' his smile was surprisingly attractive.

'It will be a pleasure,' said Mr. Beetham. 'Did you say the name is Newton?'

'Not Newton, Mr. Beetham. Euwer.'

'Ah, Euwer. In the Boer War, I knew a Major Hugh Euwer. As a matter of fact, he and I were boys together in England.'

'Major Hugh Euwer was my father.'

'Ah!' It had the force of an inquiry. Glancing at Hester's eyes, he continued hastily, 'I suppose Sir Hugh Euwer, the head of the main branch of your family, is still living.'

Constance exclaimed, 'Why, Hester, you never—'

'I believe that he is, Mr. Beetham.'

'Fine old place, the Euwer Manor. Goes back to the Elizabethan age.' The Honourable George warmed to his

subject, leaving the dangerous topic of family connexions. ' Only three years ago, when Sir Hugh was digging a cellar, they came across an inscription——'

Constance rose, and they all followed her. Gray guided Hester into the living-room.

' So you're English,' said Gray.

' No. My father was. I'm an American through and through.'

' Ever been over to see the ancestral Manor? '

' Never.'

Porter entered with coffee and liqueurs in tiny glasses. Mr. Beetham accepted a cup of coffee, and stood near Constance absently stirring it. His mind was still on that interesting inscription.

The weather, with that inconsistency so characteristic of New York, had with starting rapidity changed from summer heat to autumn chill. A cold, drizzling rain was falling. Instinctively, the whole party drew around the fireplace where a large log burned cheerfully. Mr. Beetham and Paul stood by the carved wooden mantel. Constance and Virginia sat down. Hester and Gray were a little in the background.

' Have a liqueur, Mr. Beetham,' invited his host. ' Here, Porter.'

' No, thank you, I prefer coffee.'

' And he took no wine at table, Paul,' Constance complained.
' Not a drop of champagne, either.'

Mr. Beetham drank his coffee.

An electric current passed from one American to the other. No subject was more fruitful of discussion or ill-feeling than that burning one entering into politics and religion. Not to accept proffered liquor was to be a prohibitionist! But the Honourable George Beetham was a Briton. Prohibition didn't bother them on the tight little Island. The Honourable George exploded his bomb in a very casual manner.

'When I am sheltered by the flag of a country,' he remarked, looking calmly at Constance, 'I obey the laws of the land.'

There was silence. Had Mr. Beetham been of their own nation, everybody would have begun to talk. Under the circumstances, there was nothing to say. Surprisingly, it was Virginia who expressed herself. She drawled out her words. When Virginia spoke, others listened. She was noted for her long silences.

'I think,' Virginia said deliberately, 'that Mr. Beetham is exactly right. We *are* law-breakers.'

'And *I* think,' thought Hester, 'that I shall like Virginia.'

'Your sister is brave,' she said to Gray.

He looked flushed and uncomfortable.

'You never can tell what Virginia is going to say. From now on, I suppose there won't be anything served in our house but water. So you're related to a title, are you?'

'I'll tell you a secret,' Hester laughed. 'I never heard of my distinguished relative until about three weeks ago.'

'You didn't! Next week, you're going West. Let me play around with you while you're here, won't you?'

'I'd like to,' answered Hester, frankly.

'And I like you. We'll have some good times.'

Mr. Beetham took leave when Constance returned with Virginia. He fumbled with his monocle and hesitatingly informed her that he regretted not being able to see her again after this—er—delightful evening.

'If you ever come to Bell Inn again, I hope that you will not fail to let me know,' Virginia said to Hester.

So Virginia knew, then!

Gray put Virginia into a taxi and his sister retired into her customary silence.

'I've got it!' he exclaimed.

'What?'

'The cousin out West that Hester Euwer talked about is that

crank, that little chap who helped us get home the night we lost our way.'

'Probably.'

'She don't know what she's getting into, poor girl. He's daft on religion.'

'Might be worse,' remarked Virginia.

'I say, you're queer to-night.'

'Perhaps I'm only coming to my senses.'

It was useless to argue with Virginia when she set her head a certain way.

'Seems as if I'd seen that girl somewhere.'

'You did. She was the waitress at Bell Inn.'

'Pon my word, so she was!'

'I'll get reservations for you for Friday night,' Paul said the next morning. 'You want to take the Santa Fé route from Chicago?'

'Cousin Leonard said he would meet me at Santa Fé.'

'All right. I'll attend to it to-morrow.'

He was immediately engulfed in the folds of the Sunday paper.

'So this is New York!' thought Hester, going to her room.
'Can it be possible that I have lived here most of my life and never knew what it really was? Verily, between Park Avenue and Seventeenth Street there is a great gulf!'

Park Avenue was a new, undiscovered place, with light, beauty, luxury and no care. No care? She was not just sure about that. Twice she had seen Constance watch Paul anxiously when his face was too flushed and his words came thickly.

'Gather the roses while ye may,' she sang, to take her mind from a disagreeable subject.

Throwing herself down on a couch, she began to read. Bells were ringing, deep-toned, rich sounding bells. They pierced Hester's consciousness. Church bells! Sure enough, it was Sunday.

John Dodd and his wife would be now on their way down the

long street under the elms, going to that quaint white church, its roof supported by stately columns, its windows shaded by green shutters. Probably, Jack would be with them, he was not to leave for Boston before the fifteenth of September. He went to church because his parents did and would feel hurt if he didn't. Maybe better to do it for that reason than not to go at all, mused Hester.

Her perceptions were very keen, her mind tended toward criticism. When she first went to Bell Inn, she had silently ridiculed the devotion of John and Jane Dodd to their church, smiled when the fine, grey head bowed to ask God's blessing on the food, or Mr. Dodd called the whole household to prayers at twilight on Sunday evening. Little by little, she began to like this quiet service. It soothed her restless spirit. She grew to respect John Dodd and his faith. He actually believed what he professed, lived it.

Constance knocked.

' May I come in, dear? Paul has our seats for this afternoon's concert, Hester. The car will be here at two.'

Of the next five days, Hester had, later, only a confused remembrance. She was always going somewhere. There was no time to think. How Constance and her friends stood such a life she could not comprehend, because on Friday afternoon, when Connie and Gray took her to Grand Central Station and helped her on to the train for Chicago, she was exhausted, though—she must confess—extremely happy.

Throwing her scruples aside, she accepted eagerly everything that Constance offered. The coral tulle was hers, silk underwear of marvellous fineness—it was astonishing how many things were too small for Constance! There was a set of the latest frilly lounging pyjamas, in lavender, slippers to match, gold and ivory toilet articles, of fabulous value, a wrist-watch set with tiny diamonds, bought new at Tiffany's; the velvet and sable evening wrap. Hester accepted them all and a large wardrobe trunk

brought from the store-room to put them in when she went away.

Gray Lawrence was a very pleasant companion, and enjoyed taking Hester around. She was such a happy girl, plainly having a very good time.

One afternoon they went to the Ambassador, where the band was playing, and women in gay gowns were laughing and chattering.

'Thought I saw a fellow that looked like Jacques Dufour. Must have been mistaken. Ever know him?' asked Gray.

'I saw him at Bell Inn.' She hoped never to see him again, never!

Just at that moment, she did see him, sauntering in his usual indifferent way between the tables. Once he stopped to speak to a lady. The waiters showed him deference, as if they recognized him. Slowly, he was approaching. Was there any way of escape? Not any.

Jacques was behind Gray, who looked up, surprised, when he spoke.

'How are you, Miss Euwer? Hello, Gray. I didn't expect to find either of you here. Thought you'd disappeared from the face of the earth.' He looked at Hester. 'May I join you?'

Hester nodded assent. She had lost the power of speech. Why, why had this strange man come again into her life?

'Glad to have you, Jacques,' said Gray, heartily. 'Perhaps you don't know, Hester, that this man, John Dodd and I grew up together. Jacques and I are older than John. What will you have, Jacques?'

'Oh, lemonade. Nothing to eat, thank you.'

'Been doing any flying, lately, Jacques?'

'Not much. I'm keeping our old place, and am busy getting it ready for the tenants, some people from Boston. Haven't made any definite plans yet. To-night I expect to see an Englishman, Mr. Beetham, interested in archaeology. He wants to buy an airplane and fly to the West. I see him over there,

now. If we could have our talk, maybe I could catch the night train. Pardon me for leaving so suddenly, Miss Euwer.'

'People around Burlington have a poor opinion of Jacques,' Gray said. 'As a matter of fact, don't understand him. He has the reputation of being idle and unreliable. Probably, he is both. He's as uncertain as the wind, here to-day and gone to-morrow. He loved his mother intensely, but could not stay with her. Never can keep money, spends it as fast as he gets it. That man could make a fortune giving concerts. He's played all over Europe. People went wild over him. Ever heard him?'

'Yes.'

'Then you know. I was in the Air Service with him in France. He could have been a great ace—but wasn't. Absolutely reckless, no fear at all of danger or the enemy. But just when crucial moments came, he fell down on the job. Had a spell of nerves, lost his temper, or did some fool thing—maybe got drunk, and of course, that wasn't allowed in a flyer. Ended in the guard-house while others won the prize. Queer fellow! Yet there's something about Jacques that makes young men like him. Older men do not, as a rule, but maybe Beetham will.'

'Maybe,' answered Hester, listening eagerly.

'From the way the Honourable George expressed his opinion the other night about obeying the law of the land whose flag sheltered him, I judge that Jacques will be wise to watch his step if he gets a job with him.'

Hester departed from New York the next day, laden with flowers and books, with a trunk full of pretty clothes, presents from Constance. The train was passing slowly under New York, soon to emerge by the shores of the glistening Hudson River. She had time to think over that week of wild gaiety, of pleasure and laughter, of feasts and sight-seeing.

'I wonder whether I shall ever see any of them again,' thought Hester.

X

OUT OF A CLEAR SKY

HESTER EUWER reined in her horse on the edge of the cliff. Lion, a powerful mastiff who raced after her on her lonely rides over the country around Pepper Tree Ranch, stepped on guard beside her. When she spoke, Lion raised his massive head to look at her. His glance was loving, protective; it said: 'You are only a girl. It is my duty to see that no danger comes to you.' She had seen those clear brown eyes when they were cruel, brutal. Woe to the one who offered insult to his mistress while under his care!

'Lion, do you believe that there is anything in the world more beautiful?'

Lion wagged his tail. Whatever this young goddess said was agreeable to him. Possibly he marvelled at her liking for such heights, at the hours spent here, just looking, looking. He stretched his long body out on the crag, rested his head on his paws, and dreamily surveyed the scene. The only sign of vegetation on this crag was a cottonwood tree, blasted by the occasional fierce winds. Its branches were ragged, the trunk was twisted as if it had been tortured; at the top were clusters of leaves. Hester tied her horse to this tree, patted it gently, and sat down as close to the edge as she dared. Lion crept along to her side and watched her.

'It must be at least a thousand feet down to the valley,' Hester said to her dog. 'If I should fall, there wouldn't be much left of me. The highlands of New Mexico! Seven thousand feet above New York, with air sweet as the nectar of the gods. Oh, Lion, I'm glad I came to Pepper Tree Ranch.'

For a long time, only the breathing of the dog was heard. The stillness was intense. Overhead a sky of brilliant sapphire; the heat of the sun was great, but Hester was not overcome by it. Her khaki suit with riding breeches, her broad felt cow-boy hat (given her as a joke by Dan Phyfe, foreman at the Ranch, it had proved very useful, and incidentally becoming when given a turn up of one brim and a saucy tilt to the side), long woollen stockings and stout Oxfords was an outfit suitable and comfortable.

Hester removed her hat. The curls so admired by Constance during that never-to-be-forgotten week in New York, were not in evidence, being drawn into a tight knot low on her neck. She loosened them, letting the rippling locks fall on her shoulders, shaking them vigorously that the pure air might sweeten them. She stretched lazily. What a life this was! Never in her wildest dreams had she imagined such scenery, such air. And Cousin Leonard had given her this opportunity. A wistful, tender smile transformed Hester's face. Cousin Leonard.

Could it have been three years ago that she stepped out of the Limited at the picturesque, Spanish-type station of Santa Fé? The years had passed quickly and pleasantly. Yes, she was twenty-two when she came, and on her last birthday she counted twenty-five years.

'I'm on the down-grade to thirty,' she confided to Lion.
'Getting very old.'

The mastiff opened one eye and blinked at her. And on the platform had stood a little man in old-fashioned, dusty clothes. He held his hat in his hand, while gazing, bewildered, at the gaily-dressed women and dapper men who took exercise when the through train to Los Angeles stopped long enough at stations.

'That can't be Cousin Leonard,' she thought.

Hester waited by her suit-case, dropped by the porter, and wondered what she'd better do. Cousin Leonard would be tall and handsome, as behoved a Euwer. This insignificant person

was the only one on the platform who appeared to be expecting somebody. His anxious, pale blue eyes searched the faces of the passengers.

A few Mexicans, draped in striped garments, or wearing red shirts and khaki trousers, leaned against the adobe walls of the station. A man dashed up on a shaggy horse. Could he be an Indian?

She picked up her bag, thinking it better to go to the waiting-room before the train left, when she would be more conspicuous. If Cousin Leonard did not come, what should she do?

'I beg your pardon,' somebody said. 'Are you Miss Hester Euwer?'

It was the little, bald-headed man in disreputable clothing. Probably Cousin Leonard had been unable to come and sent one of his men.

'Yes,' she answered.

He took her bag.

'I'm so glad to see you, Hester. And I do hope you'll like it here. Come this way.'

So this was Cousin Leonard! It was her first shock. If Cousin Leonard was like this, what would Pepper Tree Ranch be! He did not kiss her, did not even shake her hand. Eager to get away from the chattering tourists, he acted as if he might be frightened or embarrassed.

'Here's the car. Get in, please, and if you have any other luggage, just give me the checks and we'll load it on in back.'

Silently, Hester gave her cousin the checks. In a daze, she contemplated the 'car,' while he and a boy who had been sitting in it, went away. The boy was dark-skinned. Hester thought he might be a half-breed, Mexican and Indian. An ancient Ford it was, whose existence had been one steep hill after another, rocky roads, much mud, and an occasional sand-storm with a collision or two, judging by its extremely battered condition. The covers of what had been cushions were torn and

the stuffing was coming out. It was a touring car, and the top was torn.

Hester was tired and very nervous. A vision of the splendid limousine possessed by Constance came to her mind. She began to laugh against her will, shaking from head to foot. Cousin Leonard found her in this strange condition, when he and the boy returned, carrying the wardrobe trunk which Constance had insisted upon giving her to hold the new and fragile garments recklessly accepted in that last whirl of gaiety. He thought that she was crying, with her hands over her face.

'My dear!' he exclaimed. Cousin Leonard had an agreeable voice, though very high, and inclined to squeak in moments of excitement. 'The journey has been too much for you. Get in and be comfortable. We'll be home in about three hours.'

She was on the verge of real tears, when she brought herself up sharply. None of that!

'Go back and get the other box, José,' ordered Mr. Euwer.
'I hope you feel better, Hester.'

'I'm quite all right, Cousin Leonard. A little tired.'

'Poor child! Of course you are, and after all the other experiences you've had. Forget it all, Hester, and be happy. Our Father intended us to be joyful,' he added, simply.

For a moment, Hester puzzled over that, as she settled herself in the rear seat, while Cousin Leonard and José strapped the wardrobe trunk and father's little black one behind the ancient vehicle.

Mr. Euwer sat by the wheel to drive and the boy crept in beside him, casting shy glances at Hester with his mysterious, unfathomable eyes.

'Our Father'—he must mean God. Hester was not familiar with any one who talked as if the Almighty Being was an actual fact. Gray had been considerate, no intimation that he had seen Cousin Leonard had ever passed his lips. That he had called Mr. Euwer 'a religious crank,' Hester did not know.

She studied the back of Cousin Leonard's head, under his worn grey felt hat, the fringe of grey hair, the overcoat, much the worse for exposure to storm and hot sunshine, and wondered whether she could ever come to have any affection for this little man who talked as if God lived close by him. If one believed in God at all, one worshipped Him in church, or prayed according to the way one had been taught, to a far-away Person who dwelt in a Heaven about which one knew nothing. To bring God down to our lives, to call Him our Father—and mean it—was a new thought.

A new thought! As the car rattled its way through the streets of Santa Fé, past shops and movie theatres, past the library and a few churches, under avenues of drooping trees, behind which she saw pretty homes in the Spanish style, low, broad, with overhanging vines and flowering gardens, the words echoed in her mind. 'Our Father.' She felt less lonely.

The dog stirred now, growled, and stood up, viciously showing his teeth. With soft, padding steps, an Indian had mounted the crag behind her.

'Lie down, Lion, it's Charlie,' Hester said, nodding to the Indian.

The mastiff obeyed, placing himself so that he could watch every move Charlie made. It was plain that Charlie was not a favourite with Lion.

Hester was not pleased to have Charlie follow her around as he had done ever since his return from the Indian school in Oklahoma six months before. Go where she would, sometimes many miles from Pepper Tree Ranch, she was sure to see Charlie on his splendid white horse during the excursion. He had left the horse now in a small group of stubby trees down toward the valley.

Two years in school had done little for Charlie, the name he had acquired while away from the group of Pueblo Indians to which he belonged, except to teach him English; in this he

became unusually proficient. He did not care for books, but had an absolute craze to know about plumbing. One good habit that he had acquired when, by his own desire and a still stronger wish of the authorities he came back to his own people, was a love for cleanliness. By the hour, he had lain in a tub full of hot water; unless he was routed out he frequently went to sleep in the bath.

The first thing that he did on his return to the paternal home was to force his mother and sisters to heat kettles of water over the fires made in piles of stone and scrub themselves and the room which they all occupied at night, except himself. Charlie never slept under a roof if he could avoid it. This they did with audible groans. Since then, to provide Charlie with a bath at least once a day had been part of their duties. So advantageous had been his example, that without Charlie's slightest intention of being a reformer the neighbours dwelling among the rainbow-tinted cliffs began, in their feeble way, to clean up. The Indian's voice cut harshly into the silence.

'I brought you something, Pale Flower,' he said in precise, correct English.

'I do not accept presents.'

He moved closer, the dog pricked up his ears, his huge body flexed, prepared to act.

'It is only a stone, white girl. I found it. Perhaps your Cousin may wish to have it for his collection.'

Hester took from his hand a rough bit of stone, partially encrusted with dirt.

'I'll give it to him,' she said, shortly. 'And now I hope that you will go away and leave me alone.'

In the days when Indians roamed these valleys and plains, a white man, journeying westward would have scented danger when he saw the dull, angry glow in Charlie's inscrutable eyes. He did not go away.

'Well, I suppose I must if he won't,' sighed Hester. 'But

I'd better not hurry off, or he will think that I am afraid of him.'

He leaned against the cottonwood tree, watching her with sombre brown eyes as steadily as the dog, head on his paws, alert and ready to jump at the slightest hostile move, surveyed him.

A stalwart youth, wearing a scarlet shirt open at the neck, no sleeves, leaving muscular arms free, and homespun cotton trousers falling to feet clad in dingy tennis shoes—relics of the Oklahoma school; on his head a round scarlet cloth cap, adorned on one side by an eagle's feather, this was Charlie, whose Indian name was Spirit of the Eagle.

These were the highlands of New Mexico. The waters of the Rio Grande pierced their way through narrow canyons, whose walls rose for a thousand feet; a great river, swelling as it rushed onward to the ocean. From the rock where Hester sat, she could see far below a colony of rustic houses, where gathered artists from various sections of the land, painting the wonders of crimson and pink, of deep red blood-colour which lay around them. The town where the artists lived was toward the south.

Off in the north stretched the Sangre de Cristo mountains, glowing in the vivid sunlight, while toward the east and west and south deep canyons slashed their way into the heart of the Sierra Madre range. Spaniards had swept over this country ages ago and had built quaint villages on the plateaux thousands of feet above the sea. Not far north of the ancient Spanish town where the artists gathered, two huge adobe buildings were visible. With four hundred other Pueblos, here lived Charlie, Spirit of the Eagle.

After a few minutes, Hester arose. Lion stood beside her as she loosened the knot tying her horse to the tree. When Cousin Leonard gave her the pony, she saw that on his forehead was a white, star-shaped mark. In memory of that horse in the old

home in England, to whom in his delirium her father had spoken tenderly, she named the pony ‘Star.’

Charlie’s eyes never left her face. It made her nervous, and she exclaimed petulantly, ‘I wish you would stop staring.’

Instantly, without speaking, the Indian transferred his gaze toward the East, and instinctively, standing on the height with Star’s bridle over her arm, her glance followed Charlie’s. His body was tense with suppressed excitement. His heavy features were as immobile as if they were actually carved in bronze.

‘It is an eagle,’ she exclaimed.

A black speck moved swiftly forward, very steadily.

‘It is not an eagle, Pale Flower’—this was her name among the Indians who came to Pepper Tree Ranch—‘but an air-ship.’

‘Probably the air-mail to Los Angeles. Come, Lion, we’ll go.’

‘No air-mail. The plane prepares to land.’

Many airplanes passed over the Ranch; none had ever stopped. Hester became interested.

‘It is going to land, and not very far from our Ranch,’ she thought. ‘There’s a broad, flat surface, a good landing-place. I wonder why it comes here.’

The bird-like machine with broad-spreading wings hummed its way toward them. Louder grew the buzzing, its thunder exaggerated on the clear, high air. Circling, diving, then up again, always sweeping lower and lower, the huge machine gently touched ground and stopped.

Charlie had not waited for the landing. As silently as he had approached, he now departed. When Hester turned to lead Star down the steep path between overhanging rocks, she started a little when she did not see him.

‘Lion, I wonder what makes that Indian follow us around. It’s positively uncanny how suddenly he comes and goes. But he can’t harm me when you are here.’

The big brown mastiff assured her by a wag of his tail that he would protect her with his life.

Distances in the highlands of New Mexico are deceptive. It seemed, as Hester looked downward, that Pepper Tree Ranch was very near. In reality, the ride was long before she could reach home. Leaving the crags, she went across a sandy plain, scattered with sage brush of pale green. Here and there a tall cactus, twisted as if it had been tortured by some strong hand, stood green and lonely. A Yucca reared high against the sky a long spike of snowy blossoms. Nearing the river, whose roar was distinctly heard, although it was several miles distant, Hester guided her horse into a small valley, surprisingly fertile, an oasis on the borders of the sandy desert with its dreary wastes.

Fruit trees were heavily laden; it was mid-summer of the year 1927. Flowers of pink and gold and delicate blue were growing wild in the lush grass, emerald green. A brook rippled between the trees, a tiny arm of one of the streams flowing down from the snow-clad Rockies to feed the mighty Rio Grande. Leonard Euwer had diverted part of the stream to irrigate his land, and by dint of much labour had caused the desert to blossom as the rose and fruit to gladden the earth where there had been only sage-brush and prickly, deformed cacti. Beyond the Ranch were blood-red rocks, splashed with white, rocks in curious forms, towers and mounds and minarets as slender and graceful as any to be seen on Moslem Mosque.

Through an avenue of pepper-trees, Hester rode, Lion trotting along beside her, his tongue hanging out, for Lion was growing old; these long jaunts which his mistress loved, were somewhat fatiguing. The ranch house was long, built of logs, unhewn. Wide windows, lattices opening outward in English fashion, and paned in small squares, were set into the logs at intervals. There was only one storey, roofed with overhanging shingles. At each end of the building rose great chimneys of rough stones. Over all were vines clambering at will, untrimmed, their tendrils waving like outstretched hands seeking to grasp something in

the air. Scarlet blossoms shone among the bright green, and some gaily-feathered birds nested among them.

Riding up to the steps of a porch extending the entire length of the house, Hester threw her reins to the half-breed boy, who got up lazily from the grass where he had been waiting.

'Cousin Leonard,' she called at the open door of an immense living-room. 'Did you see the airplane? It landed not far from here. Could there have been an accident, do you think?'

Coming in out of the brilliant glare of sunlight, her eyes were not accustomed to the dimness of the shaded room.

'Mr. Euwer is not here,' said a deep voice.

Faintly, she saw the figure of a very thin, very tall man. He was adjusting a glass in his eye. 'Probably you do not remember me, Miss Euwer. We met at Paul Fitz-Maurice's home in New York three years ago. Beetham is my name.'

Hester smiled and held out her hand.

'Indeed I do remember you, Mr. Beetham.'

'It was our plane that you saw landing. I ventured to presume on Mr. Euwer's hospitality because I knew your family in England.'

'Your rooms are ready,' said Mr. Euwer, coming in. 'Plenty of hot water, too. You'll like a bath, no doubt.'

'I should say so. Miss Euwer, let me present my pilot, Mr. Dufour.'

A man dressed in very much soiled aviator's clothes stepped forward and bowed.

'How do you do, Miss Euwer,' Jacques said blandly.

And then he smiled, the old mischievous smile.

XI

PEPPER TREE RANCH

COUSIN LEONARD had a hospitable soul. People smiled when Leonard Euwer's name was mentioned; it was not a smile of derision, however, but betokened affection.

'A little——' they tapped their foreheads, 'but it would be better if we were all a bit touched in the brain if we could be like him.'

Never was the door of his house locked. Any stranger could enter in the wee hours of night, help himself to food or anything else that he wanted, and depart. Mr. Euwer did not try to find him.

Shortly after her arrival, Hester, still nervous and unaccustomed to her surroundings, ignorant of her Cousin's peculiarities, got up early, dressed, and decided to take a walk in the sunshine. Her bedroom opened into the great living-room which occupied the entire western end of the long building. A second door led to a narrow hall, lined with bedrooms. Kitchen, laundry and rooms for household work were in a separate house, connected with the main building by a covered corridor.

In it dwelt the Chinese cook, Wong, a native of China, but a product of San Francisco. He had wandered this far on his way to New York, a desired Mecca. Being short of money on account of his propensity to gambling, Wong had entered Mr. Euwer's big, sunny kitchen and stayed there ever since. More than this, except for occasional spells of backsliding which he took good pains that his employer should not know, and which occurred only on excursions to the contiguous old Spanish town, Cousin Leonard had taught him that the man who wasted his

money on games of chance was not only doing wrong, but was a fool. So Wong saved his wages.

Hester went through the door into the living-room, walked half its length, and came to an abrupt stop. There were four couches, and a divan running around the wall at one end. On the most comfortable of the couches lay a man nicely tucked in with an Indian rug found conveniently lying on the floor. He was sound asleep with his cheek peacefully resting on a big hand, his arm affectionately embracing a corner of the scarlet and black rug. On his chin was a scaggy, iron-grey beard. Below the rug emerged an extremely battered boot. A disreputable specimen this.

'Ought I to call Cousin Leonard?' queried the girl from the East, tip-toeing back to the safe shelter of her room. She heard her Cousin's step outside the door opening into the hall, and concluded to await developments. The murmur of voices continued for some time, then silence. She peeped out. The man was gone, the Indian rug was back in its place.

Cousin Leonard came in late for breakfast. With him were three rough-looking men. It was dawning on Hester's inexperience that here no one was judged by his clothes. These were no doubt respectable citizens.

'Miss Euwer,' Cousin Leonard said, waving his hand toward Hester, pouring coffee.

'Now about this man. You say he's wanted for——'

'Got into a quarrel with a Mexican. Both of 'em was drunk, but that ain't no excuse for upsettin' what little peace we got. Bein' the Sheriff o' this County, I decided to run him in fer a month or so. We traced him to your place. Seen anything of him?'

The little man smiled, and the lines around his keen blue eyes drew humorously together.

'Found him sleeping like a baby on one of the sofas in the living-room.'

' You don't say ! '

One of the other men spoke.

' Thet Sam Price hes got some gall.'

' Have some more eggs and bacon. Wong, bring some hot cakes. Coffee, Hester, our friends are hungry. They've come a long way. Now see here, Sheriff. I need some more help. How about letting Sam Price stay here on trial? If you have to have bail, I'll pay it.'

The Sheriff helped himself liberally to the cakes offered him by the Chinaman, spread them richly and poured on plenty of syrup. He exchanged glances with the other men, who nodded.

' All right, Mr. Euwer. Just as you say. We all know you. Pay the bail, an' the man kin stay here so long as he behaves himself.'

' I'll see to that.' There was a snap in Cousin Leonard's voice, new to Hester. She was to learn that he was no weakling.

' How many reformed characters you got around here, Mr. Euwer? '

The Sheriff grinned companionably at Hester. When she smiled at him, he took a second long look at Leonard Euwer's cousin. ' She ain't a bit stuck up,' he told his wife that evening, ' an' she's pritty as a picture.'

' Several.'

' I bet ye hev. Your Cousin,' he said to Hester, ' has a way with these fellers. When we can't manage 'em, we turn 'em over to him. First, he prays over 'em, an' if that don't work, he tries somethin's else that ain't so comfortin'. One or two cases he fails, but mostly not.' They rode away.

Mr. Euwer sat down again by the table.

' I'll take another cup of coffee, dear. What he said is true, Hester. There are some men here who have been desperate characters. I'm trying, with God's help, to put them on the right track. Naturally, not all are trustworthy. Hereafter, my dear, lock your door at night.'

'I will, Cousin Leonard.'

She looked at the small, slender figure going down the brick walk with new respect. Yes, Cousin Leonard was certainly hospitable. She must go now and see that Wong had plenty of good food for lunch, since Mr. Beetham and Jacques were to stay until their camp was ready. Hester had not yet had time to think about what might happen now that Jacques had come.

'I expect they'll be here till to-morrow,' said Mr. Euwer.
'We'd better have fried chicken and apple pie.'

Hester went to the kitchen to interview Wong. The Chinaman had accepted the interference of a woman in his domain with good grace after Mr. Euwer held a short, decisive conversation with him. If he resented taking orders from this young American girl Wong showed no sign. When her orders did not suit him, he simplified the matter by doing exactly what he pleased. Hester was not at all sure that if she suggested apple-pie, custard pudding would not appear in its place. Housekeeping was a new art to her, and she tried to be diplomatic.

'These gentlemen are from New York, Wong, we must have an extra good dinner.'

Wong observed her with shining, beady eyes. He grunted, being a man of few words. Besides, he had an inbred objection to talking to a woman; it was really a waste of time. Having given her suggestions, she made a dignified retreat, joining the men at luncheon, a quiet meal, at which she ignored Jacques as much as possible, while Cousin Leonard and the Honourable Mr. Beetham discussed archaeology and excavations.

The afternoon passed serenely, and about four o'clock, Hester came out on the porch where the tea-table was set. Mr. Euwer never missed his tea.

A young man rose at her appearance.

'Hello, Hester,' he said.

‘ Why, Gray! I didn’t know you had come yet.’

‘ Got in this morning, and came right over. Virginia will be here soon. Say, you’re looking fine, Hester.’

He held her hand while examining her face, her soft hair of rich, deep red, the curls caught together low in her neck with a broad clasp of gold set with brilliants—an ornament given her by Cousin Leonard, an antique. Wong pattered in with the sandwiches and cake.

‘ How’s New York? Have you seen Constance lately?’

‘ New York was an oven when I left. I was glad to get away. Constance is in Europe.’

‘ Sugar, Gray?’

‘ Yes, and lemon. Living out here as you do with great spaces, and so much beauty all around must make New York seem far away and pretty insignificant.’

‘ I love it.’

‘ Not lonely?’

‘ Sometimes, of course.’

She looked out across the garden to the jagged, curious formations of bright red rising from the arid soil toward the south. Flooded by the hot rays of the westering sun, the rocks glowed vividly. When the sun dropped beneath the horizon and sudden darkness shrouded them, the tints would change to lavender and then to purple. Toward the east, a deep canyon pierced the rocks. On the west, beyond the Rio Grande, at a long distance but appearing to be only a few miles away, rose the majestic peaks of the Sierra Madre mountains. On their summits eternal snow glittered.

‘ Is everything the same at Bell Inn? Mr. and Mrs. Dodd ——,

‘ Dear me, they’d never change, except that they are three years older. You’d imagine that time stood still at Bell Inn. Quaint old place. Of course, you know that Jack’s finished at Boston Tech. He’s a full-fledged civil engineer. He’s gone in

with a man in Burlington. They have a big contract for a bridge or something, don't know just what.'

' So he went back? '

' Yes. And the funny thing is that he's living at home, with his father and mother. I never thought he'd do that. Virginia sees a lot of him. Here comes Virginia now.'

' It is the same Virginia,' thought Hester, pulling forward one of the comfortable but much battered wicker chairs. ' More lovely, though.'

Virginia gracefully accepted tea. Her pale yellow hair was drawn in satiny smoothness over her ears, her eyes shone like yellow topaz in shadow, her mouth had lost its cynical expression. In her blue silk muslin with many flowers, falling almost to her blue satin slippers, Virginia made Hester feel meek and old-fashioned. Never, never would she let Virginia know that she still wore the dresses brought from New York, some of them generously donated by Constance. Cousin Leonard had plenty of land, with cattle and sheep, and an abundance of food grown in field and garden, but Hester had soon found out that ready cash was very scarce at Pepper Tree Ranch; she had not needed money, and had never asked for any. Cousin Leonard loved her dearly, and she had grown to love him, too. She would always be loyal to this newly-found relative who had generously offered her a home—all that he possessed.

The arrival of Mr. Beetham and Jacques with Cousin Leonard created a diversion. Jacques sat down by Virginia. Hester, busy pouring tea, wondered what they were talking about.

' You'd better be careful what you say to Virginia, Jacques,' Gray said, from his seat on the stone balustrade. ' She's a public character now. Setting right the morals of our country.'

Virginia placidly stirred her tea.

' Maybe she'd better begin on me,' suggested Jacques.

There was a painful and unexpected pause, broken by Cousin Leonard.

'Just what are you doing, Miss Lawrence?' He drew closer to Virginia. 'We have some interesting men here on the Ranch. That one, for instance,' he indicated a man who was watering the garden, a daily task. 'His name is Sam Price, and he's out on bail so long as he behaves himself. I have several others —' Cousin Leonard was well started.

'I'm interested in Law Enforcement,' Virginia said.

Turning back a fold of her dress she showed the badge of a Federal officer.

'By the way,' said Cousin Leonard. 'I hear that there's a still working somewhere near here. If we could only discover that, Miss Lawrence.'

Virginia woke up. Her whole face was alive with a new, interested expression.

'You didn't know, Mr. Beetham, what you got my sister into by your example,' Gray said, laughing.

Mr. Beetham hurriedly took the monocle from his eye, examined it as if he'd never seen it before, and put it in place before replying.

'I have no recollection—er—of having set any example.'

'You wouldn't remember it, Mr. Beetham. It was at Paul Fitz-Maurice's, in New York. You declined to drink anything because, you said, when you were under the protection of a flag you obeyed the laws of that country. It set me thinking.'

'She makes speeches.' Gray was evidently proud of Virginia. 'And she went to Washington with a Commission of women.'

Jacques got up.

'I'll be going along, Mr. Beetham.'

'All right, Dufour.'

'You'll all be here for dinner,' Cousin Leonard said. 'Beetham and Dufour are staying overnight with us.'

'Our camp will be ready to-morrow, and we shall not trespass longer on Mr. Euwer's hospitality,' said the Hon. Mr. Beetham.

His eyes rested upon Virginia approvingly. Rather strange

that so charming a woman should have taken up—ah—Law Enforcement; he was not quite clear about what she did, but it pleased him that he had been her inspiration.

'We are very glad to have guests, aren't we, Hester?' They were standing. Cousin Leonard put his arm around her; he was such a little man—in body!—that they were of one height.
'It's been lonely for her.'

'Not a bit,' asserted Hester, smiling at him.

'I know—I know. What she has meant to me, I cannot say. I'm happy to know that you will be near us for the summer, Miss Lawrence. We'll see you all at dinner, then.'

XII

AMONG THE ASTERS

DINNER was a formal occasion at Pepper Tree Ranch. During the day Leonard Euwer wore the oldest, shabbiest of clothes and rode around his acres on horseback, wearing a wide sombrero which had seen years of hard usage. Every evening, he dressed for dinner. In a suit brought from England years before, shiny at the seams, hopelessly out of fashion, he was a dignified host.

Hester soon learned that he was pleased to have her prettily gowned, presiding over a table set with much worn and darned linen of exquisite quality and a few heavily-chased pieces of silver, all that remained of former prosperity. For Cousin Leonard had not been a success financially. He put into the land his entire patrimony, which had not been large. All that he was able to do now was to keep up his stock and till his acres. The house, too, required repairs. If Hester had dreamed of fortune, she was disappointed. Whatever might have been her secret anticipations, she had felt no disappointment. It was home, Cousin Leonard treated her as a daughter, and she was happy, at least, she had been until—

The living-room was forty feet long and twenty-five wide. It served as dining-room as well. To-night, Wong had set the table by the windows where the Sierra Madre mountains bordered the western horizon. The sun sank below them, and left a glow of faint rose upon the snow. The sky was cloudless. In its deep blue vastness points of fire gleamed, a myriad stars.

‘Light the fire, José,’ Mr. Euwer ordered.

The half-breed, Mexican and Indian, transformed from a bare-footed boy to a trim waiter, touched the match to dry wood.

With a roar, flames shot up the chimney. They shone upon old furniture, a grand piano in one corner, reading lamps of brass, book-cases filled with an excellent library, a few easy-chairs and the long couch which Sam Price had occupied when Hester found him there asleep on the morning soon after her arrival.

'I've heard,' Mr. Beetham was saying as they gathered around the fire, welcome heat when chill evening came, 'that there is an ancient turquoise mine somewhere in this vicinity. Know anything about it, Euwer?'

'No. The Indians might give you information. There's a big village of Pueblo Indians about five miles from here.'

'I know. Dufour and I hope to make some good archaeological discoveries. He's been with me a year,' he continued to Mr. Euwer. 'Fine aviator.'

'Ever hear him play?' asked Gray.

'Didn't know he ever played. What instrument?'

'Violin. You don't know, then, Mr. Beetham, that your pilot recently toured Europe and played to large audiences in Berlin, Paris, and Rome?'

Mr. Beetham fixed his glass eye on Jacques, sitting between Virginia and Hester.

'He's a good aviator. No. I didn't know that he was a musician. You see, I'm not in that line. Can't tell one note from another. Now, about these turquoises——'

Hester caught these words and joined the group, slipping her hand through her cousin's arm.

'Maybe you remember that a marvellous turquoise necklace was found in a tomb out here some years ago. There are ancient mines worked by the Spaniards, silver and gold, and fine turquoises are known to have been found.'

'That reminds me,' exclaimed Hester. She brought the dusty old stone from her room. 'Charlie gave me this to-day. It looks as if it might be a turquoise.'

'Who is Charlie?' inquired Gray.

'He's an Indian, one of the Pueblos, who has had some education,' answered Mr. Euwer. 'Spirit of the Eagle is his Indian name.'

'And I am Pale Flower to the Indians,' Hester said.

'Pale Flower. A pretty name. But you look more like Blushing Rose,' Gray responded, with his pleasant laugh.

At the sound, Jacques looked over toward them.

'We're out of this, Virginia. Let's join them.'

Mr. Beetham scraped off the dirt and rubbed the stone with a cloth brought by José. His eyes shone with excitement when he spoke in a hushed voice.

'It is a turquoise. More than that, it has an engraved figure on it. I must see this Indian.'

'The only one who can get any information out of Charlie is Hester,' Cousin Leonard said.

'Miss Euwer, our hope is in you.' Mr. Beetham regretfully gave her the turquoise.

'Hester, it is half-past nine. Call in Wong and the others. At this hour,' Cousin Leonard explained to Mr. Beetham, 'it is our custom to have family prayers.'

Family prayers! Gray and Jacques exchanged a look. To Mr. Beetham this evening service was nothing unusual. His father, in the old house in England, had called together his wife and children, maids and men, and had read to them daily from God's word. A man should be a patriarch in his household. It was the first time, however, that he had seen this custom observed in the United States. He had not known John Dodd at the old Bell Inn in Northern Vermont.

Virginia spread her draperies around her, and Hester sat down, a slender figure half absorbed by a large easy-chair. In came the men, seated on a row of chairs placed near the door opening on the corridor leading to the kitchen building. Wong, the Chinaman, José, the slim, dark boy with restless glance, Sam Price and half-a-dozen others. Hester noted with surprise that

at the end of the row sat Charlie the Indian, in scarlet shirt and faded trousers, beaded moccasins on bare feet. Occasionally, however, Charlie and some of the other Indians who often partook of Mr. Euwer's bounty and shared the abundant food at the Ranch, came in to prayers, partly out of curiosity. Mr. Euwer welcomed any one.

Charlie looked from one to the other of the group. His glance lingered on Virginia's face a moment, shifted to Gray, dwelt long on Jacques, lazily sprawled on the end of the couch, returning to Hester.

'I will read,' said Cousin Leonard, 'in St. Mark's Gospel, the ninth chapter, beginning at the seventeenth verse.

'One of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit. And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him . . . and he pineth away. . . . And he (Jesus) asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. . . . If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. . . . Jesus took him (the child) by the hand and he arose. . . . And he said unto his disciples, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'

Jacques scowled as Mr. Euwer began to read. What a fanatic the fellow was! Parading his religion in this way when he had guests. And Hester had to live here, every day she must go through this. Yet she looked contented and happy, leaning her head back on the chair, her fingers loosely clasped on her lap. In spite of contempt and indifference, his attention was caught by this passage from the Scriptures. He sat up, and his eyes became alert.

As Jacques had told Hester when they met by the trout-pool near Bell Inn, he was familiar with the Bible. He kept it with

other books, sacred to religions in Japan, China and India. It had its place in literature, especially parts of the Old Testament; some of the Hebrew poetry was magnificent in its grandeur and simplicity. The New Testament had not attracted him, and never had it occurred to him that it had any relation to the individual, Jacques Dufour.

'This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'

Jacques clasped his hands behind his head and sat looking blankly at a painting of the gorgeous rocks of the Grand Canyon. The men filed out.

'Charlie,' called Mr. Euwer, 'this gentleman is interested in archaeology. He wants to know where you found this stone you gave my cousin to-day. It is engraved.'

The Indian reverted to type, intentionally. His face was wooden, expressionless. He grunted stupidly.

'Picked up off yonder.' Charlie pointed toward the south. He slouched out of the door.

'I don't believe it,' said the Honourable Mr. Beetham, excitedly. 'Perhaps Miss Euwer may succeed better in making the Indian talk. In the meantime, Dufour and I will scout around in the plane. From the air we might see something.'

Gray and Virginia said good-night. The purring of their automobile was audible for a long time, so still was the air.

Mr. Euwer lighted the candles in massive silver holders, ready on a table, handing one to Mr. Beetham, one to Jacques.

'We have some electric light, but in the bedrooms we use candles. Our old-fashioned English way,' he added, smiling.

He would have smiled more broadly had he heard Jacques' private remarks as he stumbled around his large bedroom.

'Queer old crank!' he muttered. 'Calling in all those men and keeping us quiet while he read the Bible to us. Hester must have had a terrible life shut up in this lonely ranch with that

religious fanatic. No wonder she's so quiet. Perhaps I could rouse her.' He remembered the violin smuggled into the airplane with his very small allowance of clothing.

'I wish that he had not come! Oh, I wish it!' Hester leaned out of her window.

Moonshine tipped the mountains with silver. The waters of the Rio Grande sounded in dull, continuous thunder. Otherwise, it was very still. She saw a man glide away, running with the fleet step of a deer toward the Indian village on the Mesa. It was Charlie.

'It has been so peaceful here these past three years, it calmed me. And now Jacques has come to change it. If I could go away—but there isn't any place for me to go unless I leave Cousin Leonard. I can't do that. He has been very good to me.'

In this mood, Hester went to bed and later to sleep. When she awakened to a world of gold and emerald and sparkling ruby of sun and grass and rocks, she was light-hearted, her fears were gone. To have Jacques and Gray and Virginia here, young, like herself, would make life gay.

It was still early when she went down into the garden planted under the southern windows of the living-room. In the aster bed, she gathered pale lavender, deep rose and dark purple blossoms, lacy-petalled, dropping them into a basket. She would put fresh flowers in the vases before breakfast. A slight sound caused her to look up into Jacques' black eyes. They held a new expression, gentle, tender.

'I've come, Hester,' he whispered.

'Well, I wish that you hadn't,' she said, bluntly. What was the matter with the man? Did he think that she wanted to see him, had been waiting for him?

'I've come to take you away from all this.' He motioned toward the wonderful beauties of nature surrounding the ranch house on every side.

' You're out of your mind,' she answered. It was very easy to be controlled this morning, here among the asters. ' I am very happy here, and do not wish to go away. Thank you just the same for your kindness, good sir.'

She dropped him a curtsy, smiled, and waved her hand, then vanished in the direction of the kitchen. Jacques heard her talking to José.

After breakfast, with many thanks on the part of Mr. Beetham and hearty invitations to return from Cousin Leonard, their guests departed. Jacques had not exchanged another word with Hester.

' He's angry, and I don't care,' she thought.

To show how little she cared, Hester opened the piano and sang ballads which Cousin Leonard loved. The little man came in and listened.

' Thank you, my dear,' he said, patting her on the back when she finished. ' I'd be lonely without you, child. God sent you to me.'

' He sent you to me,' answered Hester.

' That's the first time that I really felt grateful to God for anything,' she mused, closing the piano. ' If I stay long enough, I'll get to be like Cousin Leonard. He seems to feel that God lives next door.'

For ten days, Hester saw neither Jacques nor the distinguished archaeologist. Mr. Euwer wondered why they did not come. Hester did not know whether she was glad or sorry.

Occasionally, the airplane rose into the clear sky, soaring lightly as a bird toward north or south. She knew that Jacques' skilled hand was guiding it, that slender, musician's hand which could wield the bow with consummate art and wrest melody from an inanimate instrument. Such melody! Hester longed, yet dreaded to hear it again.

The airplane never came within the limits of Pepper Tree Ranch. It settled for hours together in certain spots, then rose

again. Once it soared high aloft and swift as an eagle's flight sped toward the snowy peaks of the Sierra Madre.

That was the day that the Sheriff appeared and held a long conversation with Mr. Euwer.

'I tell you, Mr. Euwer, there's a still aworkin' somewhere around an' your men know about it, too. I ain't sayin' thet it's on your ranch, mebbe yes, mebbe no, but it ain't fur off.'

'What makes you think so, Sheriff?'

The man, thin-faced, with a scrubby beard and thin-wide mouth, looked at him shrewdly. He chewed a straw, as was his custom in moments of meditation. 'Carry 'em in my pocket; help me to think,' he had explained to someone of inquiring mind.

'You've gethered a lot o' down an' outs here, sir. I know yer feelin's about 'em an' they're to be commended, Mr. Euwer. Ye mean well. Always say thet when folks wonders why you're runnin' a reform institootion here on Pepper Tree Ranch. But when there's some devil bein' raised, naterally suspicion falls on these fellers thet you've kept out o' jail. Ez I say, I understand your reasons an' stick up fer you.'

'Thank you, Sheriff!' Mr. Euwer smiled whimsically. He and the Sheriff were good friends. 'I've stood by you, too, haven't I? Who helped you capture those men that tried to lynch old Mr. Peters?'

'You did, sir. An' a brave man you was. 'Most hung *you* up, too, the crowd did, by mistake, of course.' He chuckled.

'And you think there's a still hidden around here.'

'We *know* there is, but we can't spot it. Sam Price, your man out yonder, he knows, but he won't tell. Your men are gettin' it, an' the Injuns are. Some of 'em was drunk over in their village t'other night. Should think you could ha' heard the racket. Now, where'd they git the stuff? Thet's what we want to know.'

'Charlie?' suggested Mr. Euwer.

'No, I don't believe Charlie's mixed up in it. He don't drink ez I know of. He's gloomy an' keeps by himself, an' eddication ain't done him no good except he's made 'em clean up over yonder. No, I don't think it's Charlie.'

'I'll keep my eyes open, Sheriff, and let you know if I find out anything. Suppose you go over to Mr. Lawrence's and talk to Miss Virginia. She's very keen on Law Enforcement, and a Federal officer.'

'A girl! A Federal officer? Gee, the Government must be hard up! But I'll ride over an' see her. Can't do no harm.'

The Sheriff drew his bony figure out of the chair. He stood more than six feet. He looked at Mr. Euwer, opened his mouth, hesitated, and closed it. Finally, he burst out. 'Ef I was you, Mr. Euwer, I wouldn't let that gal o' yours traipse all over this country alone.'

'She has the dog always with her.'

'I know. We've seen her. But there's dangerous folks around. An' Charlie may be all right, but he follers her fer miles on that swift white pony o' his'n. An' now this matter o' the likker comin' from somewhere. There's underhand dealin's, sir. An' where there's a hidden still there's always danger. The two things goes together.'

'You're right, Sheriff. Thank you.'

Mr. Euwer held out his hand, which the man clasped heartily.

'Ye ain't offended?'

'Not a bit. I'm grateful for your thoughtfulness.'

'Now I'll ride over an' see that woman Federal officer. I don't see what we're acomin' to, with all these women runnin' things.'

The Sheriff scratched his head, pulled on his broad hat, and rode away.

XIII IN GLORY LAND

SIT down, sir, an' have some corn-beef an' cabbage with us,' invited the foreman of the ranch when he saw Mr. Euwer enter the dining-room.

A dozen men, young and old, had just seated themselves at two pine tables. The house built for the workmen was about half a mile from the main building. A road, shaded by fine-leaved pepper trees now coated with dust, led to it. The rare torrential rains were greatly needed. Through irrigation ditches fed by water which Mr. Euwer brought from the river, the gardens and fields were flooded night and morning, but unless some rain fell soon, things would suffer. The irrigation system which was so essential had swallowed up a large part of the money Leonard Euwer had left after purchasing his land and erecting the bungalow.

'If we don't git rain soon, boss, it's goin' to be pretty bad,' spoke Sam Price, after Mr. Euwer, having seated himself, had been generously helped to hearty food, and he and the foreman had discussed crops.

It was no new thing for the 'boss' to drop in on the men and share their food. They all liked him, and welcomed him heartily.

Three of the men were convicts who had served their terms and been given a chance to reinstate themselves in life. One, Sam Price, a burly, florid-faced man, very powerful in his arms, was out on bail. The others came from different parts of the world, a Swede, two Germans, three negroes, a former cowboy on a Texas ranch, a pure-blood Mexican, an indiscriminate lot

gathered in by Mr. Euwer chiefly because he saw that they needed encouragement.

'I think you're right, Price.'

Mr. Euwer had a high, falsetto voice. This, and his undersize, made strangers fancy that he was a weakling. His employees knew better. 'He's a white man through an' through,' they told newcomers, 'an' you kin bet yer life he ain't goin' to stand no nonsense. Better watch yer step.'

'There's something I want to say to you, friends.'

The men stopped eating, turning their scarred, worn faces toward the little man. Shoulders were squared, and heads held higher when 'the boss' called them friends.

'There's a still hidden somewhere near by. Is it on our ranch anywhere?'

'No, it ain't,' said Sam Price. The other men exchanged glances. 'I'll tell ye the truth, Mr. Euwer. A lot o' likker is bein' passed around. But I give ye my word that it ain't on our land. We're none of us low-down enough to git ye into trouble with the law, boss. Ain't that so, boys?'

'Yep,' they answered.

'But I ain't denyin' that some o' the stuff has found its way among us.'

One of the Germans said, 'It's made some place back in the hills, they say.'

'There's plenty of it.' Sam Price liked to talk. 'Down to the old Spanish town it's easy to get, an' the Injuns is full of it.'

'Tell me where you can buy it.'

'We can't, honest we can't,' protested Sam. 'It's goin' agin our naturs to tell an' then hev' them Fed'rals snooopin' around to arrest somebody. We can't tell on 'em, boss.'

'I suppose not, according to your code,' agreed Mr. Euwer, rising. 'But I'll say now that if I find any of this illegal drinking on my placee, out the man goes and into jail. I'll

treat you well, but you've got to be decent while you stay here. We'll find that still and smash it.'

There was silence as he departed. The foreman broke it. 'He means it, too. We've got a good job here, reg'lar pay an' a boss who treats us fine.'

'I'll say he does,' echoed the men.

'The Sheriff advised me not to let you "traipse all over this country,"' Cousin Leonard said, finding Hester on the porch serving lemonade to Gray Lawrence. 'I don't want you to ride out any more unless I can go with you.'

'Oh, dear,' sighed Hester.

'You wouldn't object to me as an escort, would you, Mr. Euwer? I shall not leave for New York before September,' suggested Gray.

'Just the thing,' responded Cousin Leonard.

So it came about that for three weeks Gray and Hester rode out daily, following the Rio Grande northward toward its source, visiting the Indian village on the mesa, sometimes going to the Spanish town where Gray had friends among the artists. A new and delightful social life opened to Hester. Whole days were spent at the Lawrence home, with dinner on the terrace and long rides home in the evening when the air turned cool and bracing and the star-studded sky curved over their heads.

Virginia and the Sheriff were allies in searching for the still, so carefully hidden that no trace of it could be found.

'Fer a woman,' the Sheriff confided to his assistant, 'I must say that the Lawrence girl has got a good head on her shoulders. An' she ain't afear'd o' nothin'. I seen her two-three times in places where we was li'ble to be shot 'most any minnit. Some o' them fellers we meet ain't any too careful with their firearms. An' she never turned a hair.'

'Got right pritty hair, too,' conceded the bony youth who helped him mete out justice.

'What ye got to do, Josiah, in this here biz'ness,' remarked the Sheriff, aiming a stone at a tree to emphasize his words, 'is to fergit she's a woman an' hes hair like pale sunshine. Pale sunshine sounds like po'try. Can't remember thet I ever said anythin' so silly before. In these days, ye jest hev' to regard a girl ez one of us.'

'It ain't so easy,' replied Josiah.

'We've chased all over, and we can't find hide nor hair of a still, or who's runnin' it. The Injuns know, fer they're crazy drunk good deal o' the time, but they won't tell.'

'You don't think thet Charlie——'

'No, I don't. Charlie's beginnin' to feel the effects of thet eddication he had over to Oklahoma. It's breakin' out on him like a rash. He's got some new clothes an' a bright red necktie. I don't think Charlie's runnin' no still, but I bet he knows where it is.'

'That girl o' Euwers, Pale Flower the Injuns call her (she is good-lookin'!) is ridin' out with Gray Lawrence. An' I'm blessed if Charlie don't tag along after 'em everywheres on that white pony o' his'n.'

'You don't say,' said the Sheriff. 'If you're goin' to Santa Fé, Josiah, you'd better git started.'

'So Charlie's at it, agin',' he mused, as the rattle of Josiah's car grew fainter. 'Wonder now what thet feller's got under his thatch. Follerin' 'em both 'round, eh? I'll keep an eye on 'em.'

Very early one morning, when the darkness faded and the eastern sky was flooded with pale yellow and rose, heralds of his majesty, the sun, Hester and Gray rode off toward the south-west.

'We're going into the Glory Land,' Gray said, touching his horse lightly with his gloved hand, coming abreast of Hester's splendid bay, 'Star,' bred on Pepper Tree Ranch.

'The Glory Land?'

'Yes. Wait, and you'll see.'

Hester laughed; when she moved her head, the soft curls beneath her wide grey hat shimmered like flames in the rays of the risen sun.

'It's so different now that you and Virginia have come.'

'You and Jinny are getting to be good friends.'

Hester nodded.

'I didn't like her one bit when I saw her at Bell Inn,' she said frankly.

'Jinny isn't easy to get acquainted with,' Gray admitted. 'She's changed lately, though. It's funny that she's thrown herself into this Law Enforcement business. She and the Sheriff with that Josiah—queer Dick! comes from Maine—are scouring the country now trying to find that still. We turn off here, Hester.'

The narrow path wound among rocks, on the border of precipices. Far below dashed the waters of the Rio Grande. Emerging at last on a mesa covered with coarse, whitish-green grass, they crossed it, then struck into a gulch, very narrow and dark. Here flowed one of the tributaries to the great river. The road widened, and again Hester and Gray were side by side. Behind them ran Lion, the mastiff, keeping a keen watch. He was restless, turning his huge head from side to side, stopping occasionally to listen.

'Yes, Virginia's lots nicer than she used to be,' went on Gray. 'Settling down, I suppose. She and Jack Dodd are very good friends. Shouldn't be surprised if she'd marry him yet. It would suit father and Mr. Dodd all right. Only she'd have to make up her mind to live at Bell Inn. Funny what a hold those old folks have on Jack. I never thought he'd come back there. Seems happy, I must say.'

Hester said nothing. So Jack would marry Virginia. What difference could it make to her? She saw herself ringing the bell for dinner, saw the men come in from the fields, the tall figure of John Dodd, fifth, towering above the others, caught

the smile with which he greeted her as he passed on to dip his hands in cold spring-water and dash it over flushed face and wavy, fair hair.

'Up here now,' ordered Gray, and the horses climbed again in single file, straining a little because the grade was steep.

Occasionally, Star broke off a bit of shale with his foot. After what seemed to be a long time, it fell far below. Higher, higher, until they drew rein on the summit. Star snorted as he breathed. Lion, weary with the effort, for he was growing old, lay down at Hester's feet, as she stood holding Star's bridle.

'Here,' said Gray, 'is Glory Land. I came up it one day unexpectedly. Tourists do not know of Glory Land, or they would come here in hordes. Soon there'd be an hotel and gas-stations, maybe hot dogs, they follow us everywhere. I told Howard Eaton about it, and he comes here to paint. People in New York go wild over his pictures.'

'Glory Land,' breathed Hester.

Gray was staring at her. Never had he seen Hester so beautiful. Her eyes glowed brilliant as sapphires, her cheeks were rosy, her mouth tender and sweet.

'It's a pity to have her buried at Pepper Tree Ranch with that queer old cousin of hers. I wonder—'

'Heaven could not be more lovely,' said Hester.

'We're of the earth, earthy,' answered Gray with a short laugh, still looking at her with that new idea in his head. 'To tell the truth, I'm not so interested in an unknown heaven as I am in this beautiful world.'

'Nor was I till I lived with Cousin Leonard. Oh, Gray, he's good, good! It isn't pretence, he's not a hypocrite. He lives what he believes.'

'You can't honestly say that you are happy at Pepper Tree Ranch, Hester. Lonely, except when a few of us happen along, no amusements, no life. You didn't even know the artists in La Palomba until we came.'

'I am very happy, Gray. And I've learned so much from Cousin Leonard, and from these great spaces where there's room to live and breathe. It's been peaceful and quiet and restful until—now.'

The last words came unconsciously to her lips. Far away, an immense bird was soaring into the burning, coppery sky of late morning. It dipped and twisted and turned as though jubilant in the beauty of the day. A faint whirring of machinery cut the silence.

'Jacques is doing stunts all by himself. He'd never get Beetham to stay in the machine while he turns upside down just for fun. Beetham thinks too much of himself to risk that. He's coming this way, right over our heads, too high to see us, though. I've wondered whether Jacques went back to flying to work off steam. He's a restless devil, is Jacques Dufour.'

'Yes,' said Hester.

Her face had grown pallid, the rose-tints were grey. Her eyes were no longer sapphire, the iris was a deep, troubled blue.

'Look 'way down there. That's the Sheriff, I'll wager, with Virginia and our friend, Josiah. Must have got on track of something. They're coming this way. And will you look yonder!'

The dog was on his feet, growling, his hair bristling, teeth showing viciously. Not fifty feet away, separated from them by a deep cleft in the rocks was a man seated on a white horse. He wore a small scarlet cap and a scarlet shirt open at the neck. His trousers were of cotton material, very much faded. Sombre eyes were watching, brooding. Spirit of the Eagle, permeated by the influence of forefathers who had roamed these picturesque rocks for ages, was a motionless figure against the sky.

'Why, it's Charlie, the Indian,' exclaimed Hester. 'How did he get here, in Glory Land?'

'Followed us,' Gray said, angrily. 'It isn't the first time,

either. He's haunted us wherever we've been. I've seen him.'

'He doesn't mean any harm. Lion hates him, but Lion snarls if any one comes near me.'

Charlie turned and rode slowly away. The car seen in the valley became a speck in the distance. Jacques guided his flying bird off toward the north. Far away rose the smoke of a transcontinental train loaded with eager tourists bound for Los Angeles; it floated lazily on the still air.

'Our friends seem to have deserted us,' said Gray, with a feeling of relief. 'Let's have lunch.'

All the afternoon they stayed in Glory Land. Gray read to her and talked; he was a companionable youth. He took out a pocket radio, and they listened-in to St. Louis and Kansas City. Stories of college days, in which Jack Dodd was prominent—Hester questioned him closely about these—tales of Wall Street, of his yacht in which he took parties up to the Maine coast for week-ends, or down the Jersey shore and on to the Chesapeake.

Hester listened, smiling happily. With the passing of the airplane, her secret anxiety, whatever it might have been, vanished. She was by no means stupid. When Gray began to tell her of his financial prospects, of the position he intended to attain, when he spread before her the delights of a life in New York compared with the loneliness of Pepper Tree Ranch, and his voice grew deep, his gaze earnest and steady, Hester decided that it was time to go home, and said so.

Seated on their horses, they gazed silently at the scene around them, Glory Land indeed!

Tier beyond tier lay bare heights deep-red at the base shading to pale rose or cream white as they rose. Here and there were splashes of black or brown or white; or light green verdure, sage-brushes, cacti or mesquite grass accentuated the brilliance of crimson or scarlet or pink. Far below, the stream flowed

between emerald banks. In the distance the hills were mauve and lavender and, in the shadows, deep purple.

They talked little during the ride back to the ranch. Gray frowned, considering some problem. Hester, too, was seeking to clarify her thoughts. Gray glanced at her earnest face. He would have felt humiliated had he known that she had utterly forgotten him.

And so Hester and Gray came from Glory Land and rode in early twilight up the avenue of pepper-trees whose feathery foliage drooped gracefully over their heads.

Gray had reached the conclusion that he liked Hester very much. She would adorn his yacht and the home on Long Island which he intended to build.

And Hester had also made a decision. She would see Jacques Dufour and ask him to fly away in his airship and never, never return.

XIV

THE 'MASQUE' AT LA PALOMBA

THE old Spanish town of La Palomba in New Mexico stood on a tableland considerably higher than the place chosen by Leonard Euwer on his arrival from England a quarter of a century before, that is, about the beginning of the twentieth century, as the site of Pepper Tree Ranch, so named because an abundance of these graceful trees already waved their branches near the small stream falling into the Rio Grande River. La Palomba stood, also, at the borders of one of the deep canyons, slashed through brilliant, glowing sandstone; far below another tributary of the great river cutting its way down through New Mexico, gathering volume as it absorbed streams flowing from eternal snows, tumbled and roared.

Long before Mr. Euwer built his log-bungalow, some artists from the East, searching for new material for their canvases, traversed streams and deserts in their covered wagons and discovered La Palomba. Day by day, their brushes transferred to the canvas their impressions, the wonderful colouring of strangely-formed sandstone rocks rising abruptly from the plateaux, castles, turrets, minarets, even cathedral formations in scarlet and crimson and white.

That generation passed, to be followed by a group of young modern painters, finding never-failing subjects for their brushes in nature or in the Indians on the pueblo where two large cliff dwellings rose, one on each side of the dashing stream. In one of the rooms perched high above the cliff and seven thousand feet above the sea, Spirit of the Eagle was born and bred.

No foot was fleeter than his, not one of the Indians could run as swiftly or had the endurance of Spirit of the Eagle. Like a cat he climbed the sides of the huge adobe house, or the walls of the canyons. He had no fear of man or beast.

'Charlie' was a prince in his tribe. In scarlet shirt and faded trousers he looked far from princely, yet there was some distinction about him which forbade even the lordly American whose civilization had driven the aborigines into more and more constricted quarters, from treating him disdainfully.

'I've tried my best,' Howard Eaton was saying to the Honourable Mr. Beetham that evening in his studio at La Palomba, 'to get Charlie to sit for me, but he will not. Some of the Indians I can buy, but not Charlie. It's curious how aptly names are attached to these Indians. With his dignified air, his tall, fine body, strong aquiline nose, firm chin, and mysterious dark eyes, Spirit of the Eagle just fits. You could almost imagine him one of the ancient Mayas come back to earth.'

'I understand,' said Mr. Beetham, fumbling with his monocle as he examined the paintings, 'that these Pueblo Indians belong to the old stock.'

'They do. Their customs are the same as they were hundreds of years ago.'

'I'm making a special study of the Indians. Went all through their buildings. Very remarkable. Do you know, Eaton, I never imagined that the United States contained such marvels as I've found here in the South-west. Treasures, rich treasures. A man could spend his life here and die with the search only just begun. You don't happen to know of any ancient tombs or mines around here, do you? The Indian you were speaking of, Charlie, gave Miss Euwer a bit of turquoise, very evidently a part of some chain or string of amulets. Not many years ago, somewhere out here a marvellous turquoise necklace was discovered.'

Mr. Beetham abstractedly removed the monocle from his eye, twisted it, and reset it.

'Miss Virginia Lawrence and I have—er—have been searching for tombs. We find it a—er—fascinating occupation, but we've discovered nothing. Very intelligent woman, very. She—er—spends part of her time riding around with the Sheriff and his very curious type of assistant, Josiah, comes from your State of Maine—'

'We can produce curious types,' murmured Mr. Eaton.

'Looking for a still where somebody is making illicit whisky, and helping me find tombs.'

'Both are interesting occupations,' agreed Howard Eaton.
'Virginia's personal attractions—'

The Honourable Mr. Beetham responded with exceeding eagerness, surprising in a man of his cold bearing.

'I find her very pleasing in appearance. One does not—ah—tire of looking at her.'

'Here she comes now, sir. And her personal attractions are just as prominent as ever. We were talking about you, Virginia. Mr. Beetham says that you divide your attentions pretty evenly between him and the Sheriff.'

'It's hard to tell which offers the most adventure,' Virginia retorted, smiling. Slipping her hand in Mr. Beetham's arm, she added, 'Have you seen this picture of Howard's? I think it's one of his best.'

The mocking grin on Eaton's face was transformed into a welcoming smile as he turned to greet Hester, entering the wide arch from the patio with Gray Lawrence.

'So you have come to our "Masque," Miss Euwer. We are honoured. I don't see where this young lady has been hiding these three years, Lawrence, that we've never known her. We're an impecunious lot, we artists, but we do have good times, and we're glad that you are going to share this one.'

'A "Masque," Mr. Eaton? What is it?'

'Sort of Elizabethan, you know. They had them in Shakespeare's day. Our new name for them is pageant, not half so pretty. Mr. Euwer, glad to see you, sir.'

Cousin Leonard, five feet one, was the gentleman of an old school. He glanced around him, and smiled agreeably; his immaculate evening suit was so nicely pressed that no one noticed its antiquity or the shabby seams. Cousin Leonard had refused to be 'dressed up.'

'Perhaps you'd like to take a look around,' went on Eaton, hospitably.

Mr. Beetham's voice rumbled deeply. Mr. Euwer drew near to him and Virginia to catch the words of wisdom.

'The Spaniards did great things in this country. Look at the Missions they built, still perfect. And this town of La Palomba. Cabeza de Vaca came here, and Coronado. Through these narrow streets who knows how many Spanish courtiers rode on the horses they imported.'

The artists of La Palomba were giving their annual 'Masque' is Howard Eaton's home, because it was the largest and best-furnished. Eaton had exhibited in New York. He was successful and making money. The adobe house stood on the outskirts of the old Spanish town. It was built in appropriate style of architecture, thick walls, broad arches, casement windows, high ceilings. A heavy iron door opened to the street, with only two narrow slits of windows breaking the exterior wall. Inside was a hall paved in white and black squares, from which a stone staircase curved up to the roof-garden. On either side of the hall were rooms, adorned with gay hangings, and one or two rare tapestries; bed-rooms and baths, a large dining-room, and the immense studio, lighted from the ceiling followed, each one opening upon the huge patio, fifty feet square, full of shade-trees, of bright blossoms, of fountains singing and sparkling water falling from exquisitely wrought red sandstone figures, carved by a sculptor who joined the colony because he

could not live in a cold climate. His work was known throughout the world. The centre of life was the patio; its couches and easy chairs offered repose, books tempted the readers, and lamps, fed with oil, because the old Spanish town possessed no electric current, stood in convenient places.

'Here's where the Masque—whatever it is—will take place,' Gray said. 'I say, Hester, you look pretty to-night. Great idea, our coming in costume. But this big ruff that Virginia made me wear as the Earl of Leicester is a nuisance. Hot, too. Jinny looks handsome as Queen Elizabeth. Suits her style, only her hair is too pale. I believe that the Virgin Queen had red hair.'

'Mine isn't far from red,' Hester laughed.

'Yours is the shade of oak foliage in early Autumn. There's Jacques.'

Through the ever-increasing crowd came Jacques, towering above the others, his black hair thrown carelessly back. He wore a tight-fitting suit of scarlet cloth, slashed with black. It seemed moulded to his firmly-knit body.

'By Jove! Give him the cap and pointed shoes, and he'd be a perfect Mephistopheles. Face suits it, too, so pale, and those eyes like flaming coals. I never thought of it before,' murmured Gray in Hester's ear.

Others were staring. They made a path for him, and whispered as he passed by. Straight up to Gray and Hester came the man in this bizarre costume. He took both of Hester's hands.

'Pale Flower!' he said.

'Why, so she is!' exclaimed Gray. 'Pale Flower. How did you do it, Hester?'

Her laugh was slightly constrained. With the coming of 'Mephistopheles' the brightness and cheer of the patio were dimmed as though a veil had been cast over costumed guests and flowers and fountains.

'Made it. Out of paper, if you must know.'

Drooping petals of pearl-tinted paper fell about her down to her feet, clad in the same silver slippers that she had worn that evening at Constance's home in New York with the blue and silver dinner dress which had done duty ever since. She had never bought another for the very simple reason that Cousin Leonard had not been able to give her any money. Out of the mass of fluttering petals rose her head, the heart of the flower, face glowing with excitement, bright hair shining redly in the light. The quaint bit of turquoise given her by Charlie was now polished and blue as the heavens. In one end of it, ages ago, a hole had been carefully bored with a primitive instrument. Hester hung it on a slender silver chain. Its cerulean hue blended admirably with the pearl grey of the paper petals.

A low cry arose around them. 'Indians! Indians! They must be part of the Masque.'

One end of the patio held a stage; the background was a mass of green foliage. Six Indians filed in, mounting the stage. The Masque was now to begin.

'It's a history of La Palomba,' explained Gray. 'Of course, the Indians were here first.'

Tallest of the braves was Charlie. On his head were the feathers of a chieftain, on his feet were moccasins, draped around him as gracefully as a Roman Emperor might have worn his purple-bordered mantle, was a blanket woven in rich, gay colours, the border striped, the centre plain red. Behind him were five youths. One of them bore a long bow, another a sheaf of arrows.

Spirit of the Eagle, on whom every eye gazed, dropped his blanket. Immediately a boy ran forward to pick it up.

Hester was breathless with interest. Could this princely warrior be Charlie? Charlie in ragged trousers and scarlet shirt, the Indian she knew? His splendid form, bronze in hue, muscles firm, skin satin-smooth, was bare except for a loin-cloth

hidden by a short skirt of gay feathers. His posture was that of a young god.

Mr. Beetham said to Virginia, 'He might be a Mayan king.'

And the sculptor, who was known the world around, whispered to Howard Eaton, 'Is there no way that we can induce that fellow to be our model? He's superb, man, superb.'

'He's too proud. I was surprised when he said he would come to-night,' answered Eaton.

Spirit of the Eagle took the bow, received a feathered arrow from the lad with the sheaf, and aimed at a target across the patio. While the guests stood in awed silence, he shot the arrows as swiftly as he could receive them from the attendant. One, two, three—twelve were clustered in the centre of the target. Instant, spontaneous applause broke out in the patio.

The Indians did not deign to notice the clapping and shouting. Stolidly, silently they moved back against the foliage. Spirit of the Eagle was again draped in the striped blanket. His feathered head-dress showed green and red and orange against the dark background.

'Scene one,' said Eaton. 'And now come the Spanish explorers.'

Driven into the background, the Indians viewed with scorn their conquerors, the Spanish adventurers, jingling their spurs and twirling their moustaches; robed in mantles of bright blue and green, their satin doublets overhung with heavy chains, their short, puffy breeches meeting silk stockings, shoes adorned by buckles sparkling with shiny stones, the cavaliers were a noble group. With them came two friars in the garb of Franciscan monks, coarse brown robes, corded at the waist, bare feet in sandals, tonsured heads, the founders of the Missions scattered through our Western States.

'It's easy for you artists to get up a show, Eaton,' Gray said.

'Plenty of material in the studios,' he agreed.

A fresh group appeared, and the Spanish gentlemen went

scowling to the rear; the friars, however, remained near by. A man, weary and haggard, walked slowly forward, shading his eyes with his hand, looking for the land of promise. Behind him toiled a woman, holding in her arms an infant—‘That’s my Bob,’ interjected Howard Eaton—while clinging to her bedraggled skirts were two other children.

‘They belong to Greer,’ the artist indicated the sculptor of world renown.

With wild whoop, the Indians, with the exception of Spirit of the Eagle, standing proudly aloof, sprang from ambush, the man fell to the floor, while the brave warriors, grinning at the audience, bore the woman and children away.

‘An old stunt for them,’ a voice said. ‘Four of those Indians travelled all over the East last year with a troupe.’

Our early pioneers disposed of, the Spaniards and Indians disappeared, Charlie alone remaining to watch the entrance of a blithe company of youths and maidens, bearing tennis-rackets and golf-sticks. A phonograph dispensed lively jazz music, and a saxaphone blared shrilly.

A girl in white came bearing a large United States flag, while the phonograph led in ‘The Star-spangled Banner.’

‘Long may it wave

O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave,’

everybody sang lustily, saluting the flag.

‘Do look at Beetham,’ whispered Gray to Hester, ‘he’s having the time of his life.’

The Honourable Mr. Beetham sang as heartily as did the Americans, then, bowing profoundly, he offered his arm to Queen Elizabeth, and they joined the procession to the living-room, where refreshments were served.

Into the crowd came the Sheriff, behind him Josiah, his keen eyes examining the motley crowd of courtiers, fine ladies and grotesque clowns.

‘There’s Charlie now,’ whispered Josiah.

'Well, it ain't Charlie we're out to ketch. Funny he should be here with this lot o' crazy loons. We got to git holt o' Miss Virginia, but there ain't no special hurry. Hard to tell which she is, all of 'em is so dressed up. Mr. Eaton,' he continued, 'beg your pardon fer buttin' in this here way, but biz'ness has to be 'tended to.'

'You're welcome, Sheriff. Howdy, Josiah. Have some sandwiches.'

'Dunno, but I will. Probably be out late. Which one o' these ladies is Miss Lawrence?'

'The one with the big lace ruff. Queen Elizabeth.'

'Hmm,' said the Sheriff. 'Miss Virginia is a lot prettier than any pictures I ever see o' thet dame. She hed bright red hair an' a big nose.'

Mr. Eaton knocked loudly on an empty glass.

'You all know Jacques Dufour, not only the aviator, but one of our great violinists. For two years he toured Europe and South America. As a special favour, Dufour will play for us now, in the patio.'

Hester slipped away from Gray, seating herself in an easy-chair near one of the pillars where she would be unobserved. Her fingers twined in and out nervously.

'I don't see how she kin go still-huntin' in thet Queen Elizabeth rig, Josiah. It ain't adapted to horseback ridin' an' rocks an' sich.'

Josiah was practical.

'She might go home an' git into knickers,' he said, hopefully.

The Sheriff nodded. Josiah occasionally had a thought. He pushed his way through the moving crowd, falling over ladies' trains, tripping in his heavy boots on a Spanish cavalier's pointed shoes.

'Miss Virginia,' he whispered, 'we got on track o' thet still. Want to come along with us?'

Virginia, radiant in stiff brocade, a jewelled coronet upon her

pale yellow hair, was an unexpected vision when she turned toward him.

'By gum!' the Sheriff breathed.

'Of course I want to come, but I must go home first.'

She explained the matter to Mr. Beetham. He did not approve of her going alone with the Sheriff and Josiah.

'Suppose you come too,' she suggested.

As they left the house in La Palomba, the strains of a violin under the masterly touch of Jacques Dufour, wailed softly on the clear air of a perfect night.

XV

ON WINGS

IN his tight-fitting suit of scarlet cloth slashed with black, Jacques Dufour stood upon the platform in the patio, where had been grouped an hour before Indians, Spanish cavaliers and friars, pioneer men and women, and the lads and lasses of to-day, a ‘Masque’ representing life in this far-western country.

As he raised the violin, a clock sounded twelve long, deliberate strokes falling on the sudden hush of the crowd. Water fell with silvery tinkle from the fountains. The rumble of the Sheriff’s battered car died away. It was midnight and very, very still. The man on the platform, his face more pallid than usual under the mass of black hair which he hurriedly brushed back with his hand, awed the men and women, gaudily attired; the air was tense, perhaps the more so because the group of listeners was composed almost entirely of artists, high strung and temperamental.

‘The fellow has stepped out of the sixteenth century,’ murmured the sculptor.

‘Or earlier,’ added Eaton the painter. ‘One might have met him walking with Dante on the heights above Florence.’

‘Give him a dagger, and he’d made a good Caesar Borgia,’ went on the sculptor.

With a faint smile on his rather cynical lips, and without a glance at the upturned faces, Jacques played, bowing slightly at the applause. The soul of Paganini, the wizard violinist, seemed to actuate his bow, or of Sarasate the Spaniard who, fifty years before, held all Europe entranced.

‘More, more!’ they cried.

And he played as they demanded, played because he loved it, bending his face to his instrument.

At last, suddenly, he raised his head and looked across at Hester sitting by the column, hoping so fervently that he would soon stop. Why should this man whom she feared, trouble her so? Why, when he began to play, did every nerve in her body call out for more of the wonderful music?

Attuned, she was, Jacques had said that evening when they met by the trout-pool. If he called, she must answer; if he led, she must follow, yet not for love, no, not for love, but through some power that did not appeal to the highest elements of her nature.

She grasped, fiercely, the arms of her chair; she would not listen. But listen she must. Jacques was playing to her alone. A field white with lilies opened before her vision. She walked among them and breathed in their fragrance. It was overpowering, her head whirled with the beauty and delicious odours.

She threw out her arms toward the sky, and began to dance among the lilies. Faster and faster she danced, on into the shadows of very tall pines, their trunks symmetrical as columns, their fringed summits reaching upward and scenting the air with resinous tang. Other figures were drifting out of the deep green shade, robed in white gauze, floating in ecstasy. She joined them, speeding on, feet scarcely touching the ground thick with pine-needles, emerging into sunlight, a garden thick with roses growing wantonly, pink and pale yellow blossoms.

Jacques stood among the roses; he was smiling, holding out his hands——

The music ceased; the crowd shouted and clapped, but Jacques and his violin had disappeared.

From behind the column Hester heard him speak. ‘Come, Hester. Slip out this way.’

She knew that she had been waiting for this.

'Come, Pale Flower,' Jacques continued. 'The lilies wait for you and the shade of the pines. The roses bloom in an ancient garden for you. Come, we will fly away to lands beyond the sea.'

'It's uncanny!' thought Hester, terrified. 'I will not go.'

And then, she went, going behind the pillar, disappearing from the crowd of gay revellers. Jacques took her hand; he caught up one of the mantles which had adorned a Spanish conqueror, wrapping her in it. Through the black and white tiled hall they went, and out into the crisp air of the plateau set high in this wonderland of New Mexico.

'Get in,' he said, pushing her into a car.

'Where are we going?' she asked, breathless.

Jacques laughed, exultantly.

'To fly, my sweet, you and I together. You belong to me, our spirits are akin. I knew it those days by the trout-pool. We'll fly, fast, fast, to the ends of the world, you and I.'

Bewildered, frightened, fascinated, Hester sat beside him in the car until they reached the landing-place where lay the large 'plane in which he and Mr. Beetham had crossed the continent from New York.

Here she hung back.

'I can't go, Jacques. Cousin Leonard——'

'Forget Cousin Leonard. It's just you and I now, Hester. It's always been just you and I, out of the unknown, out into the spaces. Get in.'

What shall I do? thought Hester, now terrified, common sense coming to her rescue. He's crazy. I don't want to go with him. And yet, we're all alone here. Oh, why was I such a fool! If he had not played——

He waited impatiently, frowning, his scarlet suit gleaming in the half-light of a myriad stars.

Hester threw back her head and laughed.

'Now, Jacques, think a minute. After all that Cousin

Leonard has done for me—he's been so good—I simply cannot go away and leave him like this. And then, my dress, and you in that suit. I haven't even a tooth-brush. We'd have to land somewhere to get food and people would think us crazy.'

She trembled, waiting for his answer.

For the first time he looked at her with a flicker of amusement. His voice sounded less strained and harsh.

'I didn't think of that. Of course, you'll need clothes. I've got my aviator's suit here. And it is hard on Mr. Euwer for you to go off without warning him.'

Hester took a long breath. Was the battle won? Never so long as she lived would she allow herself to be again wrought up over Jacques' violin playing. It was absurd! This was easy to say when the precious Stradivarius was back there in Mr. Eaton's studio at La Palomba.

'I tell you what we'll do. Get in, and I'll take you for a ride. It's a splendid night. We'll reach the ranch before the rest do, anyway.'

'All right.'

Gently, under Jacques' skilled guidance, the great bird arose from the ground and soared aloft. In serried rows toward the west, lay the mountains, capped in white, below the machine rose jagged rocks of varied hues from purple to pink; the town of La Palomba was behind them now, the Pepper Tree Ranch-house showed as a dark spot; far in the distance wound the road on which some automobiles were passing en route to California.

Hester had never flown before. It was glorious! The wind against her cheeks, her hair tossing till the pins fastening it were loosened and the curls fell loosely on her shoulder.

A little rhyme learned long ago ran through her mind :

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

Flying up to the stars!

It got into her blood, this swift passing through the ether, the world left behind with its cares and joys, its duties and responsibilities. Let it go! What did anything matter when one had wings to fly.

'I'll go with you, Jacques, anywhere, to the ends of the earth,' she said, wildly.

He turned to look at her, and in that moment something went wrong, the engine broke its monotonous humming. It had a new sound, a sudden throb. As Jacques turned, he lost control. The big bird trembled, twisted sideways. They were sinking, sinking.

Far below on one of the heights an Indian sat, watching the airplane as it fell more and more rapidly. Charlie's eyes had observed Hester sitting in the easy-chair while she listened to the music. He heard nothing of the conversation between Jacques and Hester, but with his keen, mysterious eyes watched them leave the room, and saw Jacques wrap her in the velvet mantle. When the car started, Charlie—Spirit of the Eagle—mounted his white horse and sought one of the high mesas; from this elevation he could see the car approach the place where the airplane rested and guessed Jacques' intention. The Indian's eyes were brooding, threatening.

Pale Flower was not for him, never could she be his squaw—he was an Indian—but he admired her, worshipping as a man might a beautiful picture. And that man in devil's scarlet dress should not have her.

His trained sight followed the car into the distance, saw the airplane rise and head northward. Then he started at a gallop toward Pepper Tree Ranch.

Ever afterward, Hester remembered that deathly sensation of falling, the giddy, zig-zag motion of the airplane; the dark earth appeared to be rising to meet the descending machine with its occupants.

'Sit still!' commanded Jacques, his white face gleaming in the blackness. 'Like a fool, I forgot the parachutes.' He spoke through set teeth. 'This is what I've brought her to in my madness,' he thought.

It was impossible to guide the plane, a wild thing crashing down from the infinite expanse of sky to the finite earth. To make matters worse, clouds suddenly swept from the south-west, streaks of lightning lighted the peaks of Sierra Madre, a sharp crash of thunder broke upon the silence. One of those rare tropical storms which at long intervals burst upon desert, mountain and canyon, arising with startling rapidity, was now approaching.

Jacques groaned, knowing that he could not choose a landing-place. Inured to danger, he cared nothing for himself. But the girl—Pale Flower, he loved the name,—must she perish through him? In the few seconds, as the machine continued its reckless course, and the thunder grew ever louder and wind howled, sweeping desert dust before it, whirling it aloft in circles so that it enveloped Hester and caused her to gasp for breath, Jacques contemplated himself; the reflection was not pleasing.

An only son, indulged by his father, adored by his mother, a temper which flared up without warning, a will brooking no control, strong passions and vivid imagination added to the peculiar temperament which torments the artist, be he musician or one who wields brush or chisel or pen, and an utter lack of the calm poise and balance given by a religious faith, these were the components of Jacques Dufour's character.

With these were combined noble qualities, a deep affection for his delicate, flower-like mother, in spite of his wanderings a love for his paternal home, an undefined longing for ideals scarcely formulated in his uncontrolled mind, a seeker after truth in a vague, uncertain way.

Intoxicated Jacques had been that evening, but not with wine. For three years, since his mother's death, he had deliberately

abstained from any kind of liquor. It was undeniable that he had from the first time that he met Hester Euwer at Bell Inn, with that uncanny perception which was part of his birthright, discerned in her traits similar to his own, the good, the evil. Deliberately, and with diabolical intention, he had used his wizardry in music to influence her. He would force her to meet him on his lowest level. Almost, he had succeeded, for Hester was in a rebellious frame of mind, nothing ahead, no rudder to guide her ship through life's rocks and shoals.

Fortunately, the letter from Cousin Leonard had altered her point of view, had brought to her love, protection, and a home—for which she longed. Then, Madame Dufour's sudden death and the resolve made by Jacques to retain the property, brought something of responsibility to him, steadying his wild nature, developing his more stable qualities; both of these were his inheritance from a long line of French nobles.

In order to obtain money, so that he could discharge the debt to Mr. Dodd of Bell Inn, could pay off the mortgage and feel free, Jacques went on a concert tour under an organization in New York. During those two years he travelled around the world, won for himself a reputation as a great artist, paid his debt, and turned again to what he rejoiced in, the conquest of the air.

Had he been alone now, he would have accepted his fate with cool philosophy; this then was the end. He and the world were quits. He'd done his part, poorly, no doubt, but in his own way; let Mother Earth receive him now. Beyond that, his faith did not go.

But this girl! He had brought her to her death. By working upon her sensitive nature, through that marvellous skill which could turn his violin into an instrument which angels might listen to or devils, grinning and sinister, rejoice in, he had enticed her to her death. It was not the instrument which caused this, it was the evil in the soul of Jacques Dufour.

His hand touched the scarlet cloth of his suit, and he laughed harshly. Mephistopheles!

All this had filled his brain in the few seconds that they were falling. The earth came closer; the scent of it met his nostrils. Lightning showed a cluster of rocks below.

Hester flung herself upon him with a low cry. He patted her shoulder, supporting her with his arm. For the first time in his thirty-five years of life Jacques Dufour forgot himself.

And then came the inevitable crash, as the air-plane fell, a crushed, bruised bird of the air. With shrieks like lost souls in torment the wind rushed across jagged rocks; it whirled through the narrow streets of the old Spanish town of La Palomba, where Howard Eaton was closing windows and doors against the approaching storm.

'Well, they all had a good time, didn't they, Mary? That was a fine pageant; Indians did well. Hello, here's Jacques' violin. He left it behind; must have forgotten it. Funny, too! It's a part of his life, that violin, and a splendid instrument it is, too.'

He took the violin from the case, twanging the strings, examining the wood darkened by age.

'Cost a lot of money, I expect. I wish that I could play like Jacques does.'

'I don't,' Mary Eaton answered. She was gathering up cushions, putting them back in place.

'You don't! He makes no end of money. If I sell a few pictures, I'm lucky. All he has to do is to announce a concert and the gold rolls in. I'm surprised that he was willing to play here to-night.'

'I don't like him.'

Mary beat up a pillow with such energy that it burst; being old and worn, and feathers flew around the studio.

'Trust a woman for taking a notion. What have you got against Jacques?' Without waiting for a reply he listened

intently, laid the violin carefully in its place, and added, 'I'm glad they've all had time to get safely home. Just listen to that rain! When it rains out here it does it thoroughly. Put out the lights, please, Mary, when you've finished. Why under the sun you have to bother to straighten up here to-night—or rather this morning—when you are so tired, I don't see,' he grumbled.

'Howard, after he played, Jacques Dufour slipped out with Hester. I saw them. And that Indian, you call him Charlie, followed them. Mr. Euwer was surprised not to find her when he got ready to go.'

Eaton stopped in the middle of a wide yawn.

'Dufour probably took her home.'

'That's what Mr. Euwer said. I don't like Jacques Dufour.'

'All right, darling.' Her husband laughed. 'Have the last word. It's your right.'

'I shall have.'

Mary relaxed into a smile, turning out the lights of the tall oil-lamps, and extinguishing the flickering candles in sconces on the studio wall.

XVI

THE ALARM

IN the Sheriff's large, comfortable, but very ancient car Virginia, wearing her Queen Elizabeth costume, and the Honourable George Beetham, seated themselves. Silently, the big machine started toward the Lawrence home.

From the rear seat, Mr. Beetham spoke.

' You think you've caught the illicit whisky makers, do you, Sheriff? '

' Ain't caught 'em yit, but I reckon we'll do it soon, ef it don't take Miss Virginny too long to change her clothes,' he chuckled. ' To think of a slip of a girl like her awearin' one o' Uncle Sam's badges,' he added fifteen minutes later, as Virginia ran into the house where she and Gray were spending the month of August. ' Now, I wonder where them women'll git to ef we let 'em alone.'

' They do about everything that men do, now,' Mr. Beetham smiled. The Sheriff was a new and interesting type of American native.

Josiah queried, ' Mebbe one of 'em will git elected President o' the United States! '

The Sheriff laughed long and loudly.

' Ain't much chance o' that in your life-time, Josiah. I wish she'd hurry up. We're losin' time, an' fust thing we know them fellers will git wind of our comin' an' vamose.'

Mr. Beetham made a mental note: Look up that word in the dictionary.

' A woman might not be so bad as President. You've had some governors of States over here who were women. And in England we have Lady Mayors.'

' Yep. An' here, too. Done pritty well, fur's I know.'

' We had a good queen who reigned over sixty years.'

The Sheriff was anxiously watching the door. In the hall a light burned brighty. There was no sign of Virginia.

' Reckon we'll hev' to go on without her,' he muttered. ' Hate to hev' her miss it, too. She's a good pal.'

To hear the Sheriff call the dignified, poised Virginia Lawrence a 'good pal' was a new designation for the calm Virginia.

' Name was Victory, wasn't it?' responded Josiah, chewing vigorously.

' Here she comes! Hop in, Miss Virginny. An', Josiah, you step hard on the gas. I don't like the looks o' them clouds down to the southwest. We ain't hed a storm fer a long time, an' why it should hev' to choose this night to come is somethin' a feller don't know.'

Taking the road back toward Pepper Tree Ranch, toward the mountains, black and lowering save at their summits, where the glisten of perpetual snow faintly showed, Josiah obeyed orders and stepped hard on the gas. About three miles from Mr. Euwer's ranch he turned sharply to the left. The road was extremely rough. It was necessary to go more slowly.

Virginia bent forward.

' Isn't this Indian Gully, Sheriff?'

' Yes, Miss Virginny. Over yonder is the Pueblo.'

The car lurched and pitched. Mr. Beetham's monocle danced in and out of his eye. Finally, in disgust, he took it out and put it in his vest-pocket. He was uneasy, not liking the looks of Indian Gulch. He wished that he was at the camp, nicely tucked up under canvas shelter in the blankets which were, strange to say, necessary in the sudden coolness after the sun dropped behind the Sierra Madre range.

Being a gallant gentleman, however, in place of yielding to repinings, Mr. Beetham remembered Virginia. If he had not

offered his company, she would be here alone, after midnight, in these gloomy, perhaps dangerous circumstances, with the Sheriff and Josiah. Both reputable men, no doubt, but not suitable protection for a girl like Virginia. He could see her dimly. Her attitude was tense. Her figure in tweed knickers and a thick white sweater was like that of a boy, intent on adventure. She actually enjoyed this sort of thing!

Mr. Beetham sighed. He admired Virginia very much. First impressions of her as she looked when he met her at Paul Fitz-Maurice's in New York had been favourable. And now to see her here, in this open country where the artificiality of form and fashion fell away and people unconsciously revealed their true character, was to have this favourable impression perceptibly enhanced.

'I wonder—if I were younger——' he thought, daringly. His heart beat faster.

At that moment, as the car went deeper into the heart of the crags, climbing with difficulty, there was a loud explosion.

'Now, Josiah, you've done it!' exclaimed the exasperated Sheriff, leaping from the car, and in his frenzy dancing on one foot.

Josiah resented this unreasonable accusation.

'It wa'n't my fault,' he protested, pushing back his hat. 'How could I tell the blamed tyre was goin' to bust. They was all right when I looked 'em over 'fore we started. Must ha' been a sharp stone.'

'I didn't mean nothin', Josiah. We'll git another tyre on quick's we kin. Car can't go much further, anyways. We'll hev' to foot it.'

Mr. Beetham remembered that he wore light-soled pumps, and groaned.

By the light of the Sheriff's electric torch, Josiah started to put on the tyre.

'What's that?' he asked.

'Oh, git on! git on, Josiah! It's thunder. Storm will soon be on us. Ef we kin only git them fellers before it breaks, we'll be lucky.'

'Who told you about them, Sheriff?' asked Virginia.

She had alighted and stood near. With hands in her pockets, Virginia looked more than ever a boy. Mr. Beetham, that new and startling thought formulating in his mind, watched her with approval. He expected to spend a couple of years discovering things in the Near East, around Babylon and Nineveh, or maybe go to Africa. What a companion she would be! If—

'That José, the half-breed to Pepper Tree Ranch. Seems like he's got a spite against a Mexican who Mr. Euwer's took in. One o' his queer notions. I'm afraid he'll pay fer all his kindness to them convicts an' sich. He's one o' the nicest men I ever saw. Now that Sam Price hes changed a lot sence he went there. He's still out on bail, ye know, through Mr. Euwer's payin' it an' standin' fer him—I ain't sure whether it's the prayers mornin' an' evenin' that does it. Mr. Euwer's strong on prayers. But I ruther think it's Mr. Euwer, himself, that shows them jail-birds that he tries to live what he believes.'

Mr. Beetham joined in the conversation.

'Sheriff, you're right. Mr. Euwer is the perfect type of a Christian gentleman, and shows his example in what he does for these unfortunate people.'

The Sheriff nodded.

'Thet's what I was attryin' to say, sir. Now, Josiah, done? Git in.' He motioned imperiously to the former Queen Elizabeth and Virginia meekly obeyed. 'Josiah, what's got ye *now*?'

Josiah stood gazing up at the sky. His hat fell off; he replaced it at a precarious angle.

'I hear an aryplane.'

'It ain't no airplane. It's thunder. An' I feel some drops now. We're goin' to git a sousin' before long.'

' There is the sound of an airplane,' said Mr. Beetham.

' It's the mail to Los Angeles. Josiah, ef ye don't hurry an' start the car, I'll leave ye right where ye be.'

Closely resembling his ancestors who had so persistently resented the encroachments of the white men, defying them with courage, but also with a cruelty bred of isolation and primitive instinct, Spirit of the Eagle rode his white pony, urging him on, first by gentle measures, then by fierce imprecations, across the sandy land between the Spanish town of La Palomba and the Indian Pueblo.

He watched the rising of the airplane from its resting-place on the plateau where Mr. Beetham and Jacques had planted two tents, and were provided with the latest comforts of a camping outfit. From this camp, they set forth each day on scouting excursions, sometimes on foot, more frequently in a car; occasionally they viewed mountains, mesas, Indian villages, and the ranches scattered for miles around from the air.

Already, the archaeologist had made interesting discoveries; a cave in a deep red sandstone cliff yielded the mummy of a man belonging to a forgotten age. Buried with him were small terra-cotta figures, an idol, a curiously-formed animal, combining features of fox and dog, cooking utensils and bits of food, hardened to stone. Of the turquoise mine about which many legends circulated, Mr. Beetham had, as yet, found no traces.

Virginia became his companion on many jaunts. Gray told Hester, with a whimsical shrug of his shoulders, that when Jinny wasn't hunting illicit stills with the queer old Sheriff, she was seeking tombs with a dried-up fossil. Which he acknowledged was scarcely fair to Mr. Beetham, a very distinguished man.

' The truth is,' he blurted out that very evening at Howard Eaton's Masque, ' I'm afraid she'll marry him and go wandering all over the face of the earth.'

' What about John Dodd?' Hester asked.

'Yes, there's John Dodd, but he isn't very ardent, though Jinny sees a lot of him when she's in Burlington. That's what father would like. Then, if Jack can be persuaded to leave Bell Inn, they could live at home. Jack's got a pig-headed notion that he owes a lot to his father and mother—funny how old John Dodd got hold of Jack when he consented to let him do as he pleased. I guess we're nothing but a lot of kids, anyway, and when we know we're free to do a thing we're not so eager after all. By the way, I had a letter from Jack to-day. He sent his best regards to you.'

'Thank you.'

Hester felt a wave of homesickness for Bell Inn, quiet Bell Inn, shaded by drooping elms, for the view of rolling hills clad in soft verdure, even for plump little Jane Dodd.

Charlie saw the storm coming, too. With eyes trained in all the ways of nature, he calculated how long it would take to reach the plateau. He sniffed, smelling rain.

Mr. Euwer heard the thunder at the ranch, in the large living-room lighted by tall oil-lamps and candles. The windows were flung wide open, admitting the roar of thunder, growing ever more distinct. The little man walked up and down the long room, his hands clasped behind his back. Sometimes he paused in this restless pacing, to look out at the lightning. It zigzagged its way to earth, queer coppery lightning, now almost continuous.

'Going to be a bad storm. Where can Hester be? I don't want to arouse the neighbourhood.'

Just then Gray Lawrence came in.

'Somebody went off with my car. I had to beg a ride, and thought I'd stop here for the night, if you can put me up.'

'I'm worried about Hester, Gray.'

'Hester? Isn't she home? I missed her at Eaton's, but thought you'd taken her to the ranch. Maybe she went with Virginia. Beetham disappeared when Jinny did, and I imagine

they went off on one of their wild-goose chases. She told me that Beetham would see that she got home safely.'

'I caught a glimpse of the Sheriff,' Mr. Euwer said thoughtfully, 'and fancy that he may be in that party, but that does not account for Hester's disappearance. She is not interested in stills or old turquoise mines.'

'The old chap is worried,' Gray said to himself. A thought came swiftly as the lightning flashed. 'I didn't see Jacques, either, when I left. If they went out together, you'd think that she would have told her cousin. Besides, she ought to have been home long ago. Maybe Jacques took my car.'

'Suppose we start out and hunt for Virginia and Beetham,' Gray suggested. (It will be like hunting for a needle in a haystack, but he ought to be kept moving.)

'All right.'

'Jacques!' mused Gray, very uneasy in his mind. 'That dare-devil can think up as much mischief as the gentleman whom he impersonated this evening. Handsome fellow! And his playing takes the heart out of you. Looked in that scarlet suit as if he'd just stepped off the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House after a performance of *Faust*. And that's exactly what he intended. I wonder if Hester——'

Charlie arrived next at Pepper Tree Ranch. He patted his white pony; inured to all kinds of rough travel as the horse was, the fury with which the Indian had urged it on caused it to quiver with fatigue.

'It's beginning to rain, and you're dripping with sweat,' he said. 'I'll put you in the stable.'

As everything about the place was unlocked, there was no difficulty about finding a stall. Charlie carefully covered the pony with a blanket, and patted him gently. When the Indian left the stable, the white pony whinnied an affectionate farewell.

Spirit of the Eagle entered the living-room abruptly.

' I think that I know where Pale Flower is, Mr. Euwer,' he began. ' Let us go quickly and find her.'

' You do! '

' She left Mr. Eaton's with Red Devil.'

' Red Devil? '

Charlie's shapely mouth twitched, whether from anger or amusement, it was difficult to say; an Indian's moods are mysterious to the white man.

' Red Devil who plays the violin.'

' Oh, you mean Mr. Dufour.' Leonard Euwer gave a sigh of relief. ' Then she's all right, and will soon return. If she had told me——'

The Indian's eyes gleamed with fire.

' I'm not so sure that she is all right.'

' Your car is at the door, Mr. Euwer,' Gray said. ' I'll have to fill up with gas, and then we'll go, if Charlie can guide us. Will you help me? '

' Sure,' answered Charlie.

Very carefully, he laid his head-dress, symbol of his rank among the Pueblos, on one of the couches. His sleek, black hair glistened in the rays of the lamps. Picking up his red blanket, Spirit of the Eagle followed Gray to the ranch filling station.

Rain was now falling in huge drops, promise of a heavy downpour. Wind was rising. It whistled through the pepper trees bordering the winding road in front of the house, tossing the branches until they writhed in agony.

' I'll call Sam Price,' Mr. Euwer said. ' Wait just a minute.'

Soon he returned with big Sam Price, who had leaped from his cot, slipping on trousers and coat, ready for an emergency. Both he and Mr. Euwer bore arms. One could not tell into what dangers one might run in a deserted country. It was now almost two o'clock in the morning.

' Tell me where to go, Charlie.'

' Due west, Gray.'

And they started westward. Rain was coming now in a deluge. Clouds hung low. The lamps of the car pierced intense darkness, broken by flashes of blue-gold lightning. Thunder rolled almost continuously.

'Turn here,' ordered Charlie.

Soon they were climbing a very rough road.

'From here, we must walk,' said the Indian.

Gradually the rain ceased, the wind died away, the clouds drifted toward the east, and the sky, pointed with tiny flecks of light, arched placidly over their heads.

Stumbling over loose stones the four men climbed. They did not speak. The moment was too full of anxiety for three of them.

Finally Charlie said: 'I cannot be sure, but I think that we shall find Pale Flower in or near the deserted turquoise mine. The airplane fell about that spot.'

The airplane fell! Then she had gone away with Jacques, the airplane pilot!

XVII

THE TURQUOISE MINE

HOW long she had been on the ground while the storm raged around her, Hester could not tell. When consciousness awoke, the rain was pelting her viciously. This was no gentle April shower moistening the earth and causing it to burst into bud and blossom; it was tropical, passionate, cruel, a storm of desert and wild rugged mountains and canyons striking deep into the heart of gorgeous rocks, and raging, muddy rivers. The forces of nature on earth, or in the sky, were virile, active; at times placid and beautiful, at times terrifying and destructive.

Sharp as cutting hail the drops fell upon Hester's face. Fortunately, her body was still encased in the cloak which Jacques had seized at Howard Eaton's and wrapped around her in that moment of madness when they left the adobe house at La Palomba. Vivid flashes of lightning showed a circular basin, symmetrical as the crater of a volcano, possibly it was a crater out of which in prehistoric times flames and lava had shot high in air, bringing upheavals through earthquakes, and devastation in its wake.

Rocks rose precipitously around the circular space. By day they may have been brilliant with the iridescent hues peculiar to this section. At night, when copper-tinted lightning illuminated their picturesque outlines, they were black and fearsome, except where glimmered layers or splashes of pure white limestone.

Hester sat up. Her hair was dripping, her cloak began to

be soggy and heavy; soon she would be soaked to the skin. What should she do? Where could she find a shelter? What was this place and how did she get here?

A black object near her caught her attention. Her bewildered brain began to function, fitting a perfect pattern together of the broken bits of remembrance. Howard Eaton's studio—Jacques stand at one end playing his violin—Jacques—a car under the open sky—clouds blotting out the stars—lightning on the distant horizon—the camp—the airplane—

That black object was the airplane; it had fallen into this dreadful place! Jacques—where was Jacques? Only the thunder rolling in constant circles around her, answered.

Gently, she moved. By a miracle no bones were broken; she stood up. Bruised she was but not wounded. She must have been thrown out when the huge machine struck the ground. In a bright flash of lightning, she saw the plane lying on its side, one powerful wing folded underneath, the other extending into the air.

It terrified her that she could not see Jacques. Perhaps he was dead, and she was alone in the storm! Hester crept under the shelter of one huge, projecting wing. Beneath the rocks at one end, she saw the steady glow of a fire. Apparently it was in a sheltered place, perhaps a cave. There was a figure outlined in front of the flames, now another. Men came running toward the fallen plane, two men, one tall, one short. The storm had spent its violence and was drifting away. The thunder ceased and darkness was less intense.

'Must be a mail aryplane,' suggested the taller man.

They went toward the other side of the wreck.

'If it is, we'd better git out o' here pretty quick.'

That was a foreigner speaking. Hester caught familiar accents; she had heard that voice at Pepper Tree Ranch.

'Yep. The quicker the better ef he wears Uncle Sam's brand. But, Pedro, ef the feller's hurt, we'll try to make him

comf'table an' git him out o' here. It's only human to help him.'

The man called 'Pedro' laughed.

'Best thing we kin do, Tim, is to run away. We can't smash the still to-night an' nobody's ever come here before. They'll search, of course, so we'll hev' to move. Come along. What's the use o' looking fer him?'

Hester wrung her hands and bit her lips to keep from crying out. Jacques was dead, or he would hear these voices. She knew now who was speaking, Pedro was his name, one of the ex-convicts whom her Cousin Leonard in the goodness of his heart and breadth of philanthropic spirit was employing at the ranch, a Mexican. He was only five feet tall, had a narrow, swarthy face with a deep scar extending across the side of his flat, broad nose and toward the left ear. Pedro wore gold ear-rings. His mouth was wide and his teeth large, with spaces between them. It were better for Hester to be dead than to fall into the hands of Pedro, the Mexican ex-convict.

'We ain't beasts,' snarled Tim. He snapped a flashlight. 'Come along. We'll find this man, livin' or dead. An' then we'll git him outside this hell-hole an' call up the ranch an' tell Euwer where he is. Nobody will know my voice there. We gotta do it or hev' 'em find that still.'

'All right,' answered the Mexican, unexpectedly docile.

'Euwer will take care o' him,' went on Tim.

Stillness had come after the tempest; Hester heard their voices distinctly, though she could not see their faces.

'Euwer!' The Mexican laughed. 'The old canting fool.'

'Now you look a-here,' Tim threatened. 'Ef you say another word ag'in Euwer, I'll blow yer blasted head off, an' you better believe it.'

'I didn't mean nothin',' grumbled the Mexican. 'But I git tired o' you fellers a settin' up Euwer like a little saint and worshippin' him.'

' He's mighty close to it or he wouldn't ha' taken you in an' give you work an' a chanceet to be a man ag'in after all them years you spent in——'

' None o' that! '

' All right. But ye needn't turn around an' bite the hand that feeds ye. I ain't beholden to Leonard Euwer fer nothin' but he's more like the Christ he talks about than any man I know.'

' Pah! ' said the Mexican. ' I works for all I gits.'

' We're wastin' time. Soon it'll be mornin' an' somebody will be lookin' fer that aryplane.'

' Did you hear somethin'? ' asked Pedro.

' No. Git a move on ye an' help me lift some o' this wreakage. Pretty well smashed, I'll say.'

Pedro looked toward the cave in the rock where the flames of the fire were dying down. He was nervous.

' I tell ye, Tim, we'd better git out o' here now.'

' An' I tell ye, Pedro, that we ain't gonna do it. Heave now! We can't git at that cockpit from this side. That's clear. Come on around.'

Hester gathered her cloak closer around her. They were coming nearer.

' You go over an' bring me a brand from the fire, Pedro. This here 'lectric light ain't no good.'

While the Mexican ran across the loose stones toward the cave, Tim came around the corner of the wing which projected into the air.

' My land o' Goshen. What's that? '

Hester moved in the shadow.

' Somebody's alive, then. Who be you? Great Scott, ef it ain't a girl! ' He seized her arm, holding up his torch to illuminate her face. The cloak fell, revealing the grey petals of Pale Flower's dress, very much wrinkled. Tim's eyes settled on the carved bit of turquoise hung by a slender gold chain

on her neck. He whistled softly. ‘ Guess you wasn’t a-runnin’ this aryplane.’

‘ I’m Hester Euwer. Somewhere under there,’ she shivered, —Tim stooped to pick up the cloak, awkwardly placing it around her—‘ is Jacques Dufour.’

‘ Sure enuff. Might ha’ knowed it was that plane them two men come in. Got it in my head it must be the mail. So he’s under there, is he? Now, my gal, don’t you be skeered. We’re rough men but we ain’t frightenin’ no wimmin. An’ we’ll hev’ him out soon. Don’t believe he’s hurt a bit, only jest kinda stunned like. Why don’t that Pedro come? We got a fire over yender an’ ez soon as we git yer friend a leetle more comf’table, you kin set by it an’ git warm. Queer how bitter cold the air gits at night up here. After the storm, too. So your name’s Euwer. Set down, gal. I know yer Cousin or Uncle well. Ef I git aholt o’ that Mexican,’ he muttered, ‘ I’ll change his ugly face fer him.’

Tim was plainly worried. Pedro had utterly disappeared. Probably the fellow had run away; afraid of his skin!

The car bearing Mr. Euwer, Gray, and Charlie climbed over the loose rocks, tipping perilously on ledges, righting itself to creep higher; it was panting and blowing.

‘ We’ll have to get out here,’ said Charlie, when they reached the barrier of a deep gulch.

Far below, water was rushing, one of those streams which swelled the Rio Grande. Scrubby trees clung to the side of the ravine. The men followed the sure-footed Indian.

Charlie had cast off blanket and moccasins; bare-footed and clad only in the loin-cloth, over which hung a wide girdle of feathers, his costume as an aboriginal Indian in the Masque, he walked with as much ease as his forefathers born generations before, when they tracked the encroaching Pale Faces and brought them down with their tomahawks.

Underneath his stolid exterior, Spirit of the Eagle was much

disturbed in mind, not about Jacques Dufour—he was a man and must take care of himself—but for Pale Flower, whom, in his queer Indian way, he regarded as a superior being, a fragile creature, one to be protected. For this reason, and from no base motive, he had followed her on his white pony, had watched her from the heights, had waited to see her enter Pepper Tree Ranch in safety, accompanied by the big mastiff who refused to make friends with him.

In Charlie's partially civilized nature was an intense hatred of Jacques Dufour, who had persuaded Pale Flower to accompany him on a mad flight.

‘Where are we going, Charlie?’

‘To the turquoise mine, Mr. Euwer.’ Charlie turned his head to answer. ‘I am quite certain that the plane fell there.’

‘We can try.’

Mr. Euwer felt at that moment the weakness of mature years and a great sadness. He was fond of Hester; she had crept into his lonely heart and nestled there. She had become a part of his home, had brightened the monotonous life of the ranch with her dainty, sweet presence, her music and flowers. He prayed that he might find her alive.

Mingled with this was a feeling of detestation of Jacques because he had brought her into this danger. Leonard Euwer’s nature was complex. Gentle, winning, compassionate toward the sinner, ready to give assistance, to forgive as he hoped to be forgiven, he possessed also a stern condemnation of wrong and injustice. The weak should be protected from cruelty on the part of the strong; women, little children, the birds in the trees—he forbade his men to destroy them—the lambs in the fields, the young of all kinds, and especially Hester, the light of his eyes, whom he regarded as an adopted daughter. As for Jacques Dufour—

Entering a passage opening from the borders of the stream, the men were obliged to stoop. After going about fifty feet

they emerged suddenly in a wide open space surrounded by cliffs. The light of dawn crept in ghostly pallor over the ancient crater. The stars disappeared; pearl and rose in the east already tinged the gorgeous sandstone rocks.

'The airplane!' cried Gray, pressing forward. 'See how many people there are! Women, men.'

Under the wing of the airplane stood the Sheriff, grim and unsmiling. Near him was Virginia; on the ground at her feet lay a man, bound. It was Pedro, the Mexican, his dark eyes bright with helpless anger.

'I don't see Hester,' said Mr. Euwer.

The Indian was striding ahead of them. He turned at these words. Over his heavy features came a faint smile; he was not given to emotion.

'Yonder is Pale Flower, Mr. Euwer, alive and well. See her? She stands near Mr. Beetham.'

'Thank God!' In a moment, Hester was in her cousin's arms, and she was crying on his shoulder.

'There, there, don't cry, dear,' he patted her gently. 'You're safe and we'll soon be home.'

It was like Cousin Leonard not to ask questions, Hester thought. If she did not voluntarily tell him how she happened to be in the old crater at dawn with a smashed airplane, he would not demand an explanation. It was Cousin Leonard's way, to trust people.

Out of the wreck of the plane, Josiah and Tim were lifting a limp body. They laid it down gently.

'I reckon,' said the Sheriff, slowly, 'thet you'd better take them gals back to the car. This ain't no place fer 'em, Mr. Euwer.'

'Beetham,' Leonard Euwer said, 'will you accompany them? Charlie will show you the way.'

Mr. Beetham took Virginia's arm, supporting Hester, also; they turned to follow the Indian. The monocle hung over the

archaeologist's cavalier's costume. It jangled as the group walked toward the rock-passage. He had forgotten to screw it into his eye. As a matter of fact, the grave scholar had become very human indeed; he had been jolted hard that night.

'This isn't the way we came in,' said Virginia.

Even Virginia was changed. Her voice was deep, sympathetic. All her life, she had known Jacques Dufour. Perhaps he was dead. What happened when a person dropped out of life? Only a few hours before, he had held his violin, had entranced the group of gaily-robed men and women in Eaton's studio with wonderful music, and now—where was that part of Jacques Dufour which animated his mind and thoughts and actions, the unseen part, the soul? Death had never come so close to Virginia before, death with its mysteries. What was there beyond?

Hester's body moved mechanically forward through the low corridor under the rocks, out on the borders of rippling water, up the rocks to the summit. The Indian lifted her into the car, Virginia took the wheel and they started down the precarious descent, along precipices, into which with startling distinctness loose bits of shale rattled, then out upon open ground, with the green of the ranch trees ahead of them. The Indian returned to the group beside the fallen plane.

Mr. Beetham sat beside Hester. There was no conversation. Each one was busy with their thoughts. Virginia, lips set tightly, was concentrating on her difficult, somewhat dangerous task of guiding the car.

Mr. Beetham was thinking about that poor young man whose limp form betokened an untimely end. He had been his companion for several months, an intelligent man and an excellent companion. Perhaps he was not dead; he sincerely hoped so. Even while he was anxious about Jacques' fate, the passion of his life had asserted itself. He had picked up a bit of stone lying among the rocks; he was sure, almost positive,

that it was a turquoise. If so, his reputation and perhaps his fortune were assured. It was an agreeable prospect to contemplate even in view of the present sad circumstances.

Hester's thoughts were still confused; her brain seemed paralysed. Even when, under Virginia's care—who could have imagined that Virginia could be so tender in her ministrations!—she was undressed resting in her bed in the large room of the ranch-house, where sunlight danced on the white furniture and pretty chintz hangings, after Virginia had kissed her and told her not to worry, Hester scarcely realized what had occurred in the night or the condition in which Jacques, her companion in a reckless adventure, was at that moment. Sleep came instantaneously.

An hour later, the men carried Jacques' body into the ranch-house, laying it down with a solicitude that one could not have expected from such rough characters as the Sheriff and Tim Jones, his prisoner.

'We'll leave ye now, Mr. Euwer.' The Sheriff scratched his head. 'I gotta git over to the jail with this feller here, an' then git back fer thet Mexican o' yours thet Josiah's a-shepherdin' up yonder.'

'Thank you, Sheriff, for your help. The doctor will be here soon, and then we'll know whether Mr. Dufour is alive or dead. He appears to be dead, poor man!'

The Sheriff's eyes were keen with curiosity. He had handcuffed Tim and held him by the arm, though the big man made no effort to escape.

'Kinda funny them two bein' off in thet aryplane thet time o' night,' he observed.

Mr. Euwer appeared quite tall when he replied, with a slight drawl.

'Oh, no, Sheriff, there wasn't anything very funny about it.'

'Well, I didn't mean exactly funny, sir.'

' Young people now-a-days think little of a spin in an airplane. Mr. Dufour evidently lost his way in the storm.'

' Yes, o' course that's it. Ez ye say, Mr. Euwer, young folks o' this day jest wander around ez the spirit moves 'em. I'll call up in a leetle while to know what the doctor says. Come along, you Tim Jones. B'en a'lookin' fer you fellers some time an' now I got ye, yer goin' to hev' quite a bit o' rest in the county jail. We'll smash yer still fer ye, too.'

' Oh, Sheriff,' said Mr. Euwer, ' just let me know when this trial comes on.'

' It'll be right soon. I'll let ye know, Mr. Euwer.'

The Sheriff shook his head again, before he put on his hat. He pushed Tim Jones into the front seat of his car and mounted beside him.

' Might ha' knowed the little man would butt in this affair,' he grinned broadly. ' Now I s'pose he'll want to convert thet Mexican an' Tim Jones. Well, I must say he's made a good job out o' Sam Price. How'd you like to be converted?' he asked Tim suddenly.

' Converted? What d'ye mean?' inquired the amazed Tim.

' Jest what I say. Git the taste fer likker taken right out o' yer system, fergit ye ever seen a still, git to work an' earn good money, set in at prayers an' go to church ez yer God-fearin' parients taught ye to. Thet's bein' converted.'

An understanding smile spread among big Tim's leathery wrinkles.

' Reckon ye mean, Sheriff, that ye're goin' to let Leonard Euwer loose on me. Ef Leonard tells me I got to git converted, ye bet yer life that's jest wot I'll do.'

' There you are. Here's the jail, where you're agoin' to take a nice long rest. Now I'll git back an' pick up Josiah an' yer little playfellow. I'll bring ye a few splinters o' that still fer a sooviner.'

The Sheriff heaved a deep sigh, guiding his old machine across the rough way in burning sunshine.

'Never see nothin' like the holt that leetle man gits on them fellers. It's queer. Sometimes I think there's somethin' inside o' him that's a lot bigger'n he is, a-workin'. Lord knows I ain't religious, never was, but I was brung up right, back yender, an' I believe Euwer's got religion, honest, I do. That sort o' religion that a man *feels*. I'll bet a dollar he'll take on the job now o' convertin' Tim. Whoa, Sally, I'll git out here.'

Obediently, Sally came to a halt and waited patiently until the Sheriff appeared with Josiah and Pedro the Mexican, silent and sullen.

XVIII

DOWN WITH THE LAW!

'NOW, ye might ez well come clean,' counselled the Sheriff, surveying his two prisoners. 'You fellers wasn't a-runnin' that likker business all alone. Why, it's been circulatin' 'round this county fer six months an' it was all home-made stuff, too.'

'Tasted it, did ye?' sneered Pedro, slouched down in a chair.

'Never you mind. Our bizness is to git you men that's workin' ag'in the law. Law an' order we gotta hev' in this land an' we're goin' to, too.'

The Mexican gave a sudden shrill cry, startling Josiah so that he swallowed a bit of dry grass that he was chewing. The Sheriff's feet came down with a bang to the floor from the desk where they were reposing.

Pedro shouted something in his native tongue. His eyes were rolling viciously.

'What's that? What'd ye say?'

'Down with the law!'

'Say, a leetle more o' that out o' ye an' this law ye hate so will put ye in the pen an' keep ye there.'

The Sheriff took off the old felt hat which he wore indoors and out, looked into it as if he wanted inspiration and carefully put it on over one ear. The Sheriff's hat symbolized his moods. Josiah was wont to say, 'Ef the old man's hat is a'settin' on one o' them big ears o' his'n, you'd better watch out.'

'Hev' to git wimmin fer officers,' jeered Pedro.

The Sheriff glared at him. 'No talking about Miss Lawrence, an' you shet yer head, Pedro. Boys, who's the rest o' your gang?'

The Mexican laughed in his ugly, insolent way.

Tim was silent.

'Spit it out!' ordered the Sheriff, firmly. 'I ain't wastin' words. Somebody hes done the carryin' around while you two made the mash up there in thet old crater. You'll never make no more in thet still. It's all smashed up. Josiah, where's them pieces o' wood I brung fer us to remember the dear departed by? Here, Tim, one fer you.'

Tim sheepishly accepted the piece of the still, Pedro threw his across the room.

'Ye've got a nice disposition,' the Sheriff observed him thoughtfully. 'So nice thet I think I'll phone down to Sante Fé an' they'll come up this afternoon an' git ye. You're wanted, you know, fer escapin' from the Penitentiary after ye killed the man ye worked fer down south. They'll be reel glad to see you, been a-lookin' fer you some time.'

The Mexican began to sob, throwing himself down on the brick floor and writhing.

'Josiah, help me git him into the other room. Now, Tim, you come clean. Who's the others?'

Tim's face was white. A reddish beard was on cheeks and chin, his hair fringed a bald spot.

'I can't tell ye, they'd kill me. But I'm sick o' this sneakin' bizness, Sheriff. I never touch the stuff——'

'What ye been makin' it fer?' asked the amazed man of the law.

'Money. What most folks gits in mischief fer, ain't it?'

The Sheriff set his hat straight on his head, a good sign, though Tim was not familiar enough with him to know it.

'Yes, it is. Most of 'em go wrong wantin' money to support some gal or do some sort o' deviltry. Ye don't look like thet kind though, Tim.'

The big man moved his feet nervously.

'I ain't—least I never was till now. Got two old folks back

yender in Ohio, my grandparents. Nobody to take keer of 'em an' the farm's goin' to be sold fer debts. I been sendin' 'em money fast as I could earn it, wandered all over Arkansaw an' Missouri an' now here. But it wasn't enough. So I took up with the gang. Yes, there's a gang all right, but I ain't goin' to tell ye who they be, an' it's not because I'm afraid o' my life, either. I won't turn informer, Sheriff.'

' Gimme yer hand, Tim. I like ye an' I ain't goin' to force ye to go back on them ez ya worked with even though it was a devil's bizness. We'll git them fellers. I think I've guessed two of 'em right now. Supposin', jest supposin', Tim, that you was to git a big fine an' pay it, would ye quit this wanderin' around which'll never git ye nowheres an' go straight back to them old folks an' work the farm fer 'em? '

Tim looked the Sheriff straight in the eye.

' I would. But I ain't got no money, it's God's truth.' He emptied his pockets. ' Three dollars an' fifty-five cents. That won't take me fur. But I'm a good walker. How soon kin I go, Sheriff? I want to go—home. Mebbe I can earn the fine. Would Mr. Euwer take me? '

' I was thinkin' there might be a chanceet on Pepper Tree Ranch. Mr. Euwer'll need somebody to take the place o' that good fer nothin' Mexican.'

Three days later, Pedro the Mexican was paying for his crimes locked up in the Penitentiary from which he had escaped to be a menace to any community where he lived. Tim, gratitude in his heart, was working under Sam Price, keeping the grounds in order around the ranch-house.

' Did he pay yer fine? ' inquired Sam, indicating with his hoe the diminutive form of Leonard Euwer.

Tim's face shone.

' He did. An' ez soon ez I earn enuff to pay him back an' git my fare to Ohio, I'm a-goin' back home.'

' He's a white man,' asserted Sam Price. ' One of them

thet lives up to what he preaches. Ef I hed a home,' he continued, looking off toward the mountains, 'I'd go there. I'm sick o' this sort o' life, never gittin' nowhere.'

'Ef ye want to be my pal,' responded big Tim, diffidently, 'ye could come with me an' we'd work the farm.'

'I gotta serve my time first. Mr. Euwer, he got me out on bail. I must stay here an' behave myself. I b'lieve I'll take my dose. An' then, I'll go with you to the farm. Truth is, it don't pay to go crooked.'

'I'll say it don't.'

The men worked on in silence, while around them was the beauty of a perfect day. Finally Tim spoke.

'Thet gal lyin' in the big chair on the porch is Euwer's gal, ain't she? The one that was wrecked in the aryplane.'

'Yep. Thet's her. Nice gal, too, quiet an' good-lookin'. Mr. Euwer sets lots o' store by her. She wasn't hurt a bit, only shook up an' kinda nervous.'

'How's the man gittin' on?'

'Not so good. He's all bruised up an' must ha' struck on his head. He ain't opened his eyes nor spoke sence they brung him in. Doctor thinks mebbe they'll hev' to op'rare on his brain. But to do thet, a great doctor hes to come from Frisco. He may die anyway. Too bad, such a young feller.'

'Kinda cracked, though, wasn't he? I used to hear him playin' the fiddle nights when I passed their camp, sounded pritty, too, like birds singin' an' sich. I played fiddle myself once, so I know how it feels. But to take thet gal out in the plane, middle o' the night, was a crazy stunt.'

'Well, he's payin' fer it. You better git on with the mowin', Tim.'

All through September Jacques Dufour lay in the guest-chamber of Pepper Tree Ranch, its casement windows open to catch the sweet-scented air, the cool breezes at nightfall when the Sierra Madre peaks gleamed wraithlike in moonlight, the

heated breath from the desert lying toward the south-west. His eyes did not open to behold the autumn asters blooming in the garden beneath the windows where Hester gathered flowers to decorate the big living-room, glancing up occasionally, wondering whether Jacques would ever wake to consciousness.

Nor did Jacques know that a large squaw sat by him during the day, fanning him or placing cool water in his mouth, or the medicine the doctor left; he swallowed automatically, relaxing again into that immobility which had held him in unconsciousness ever since the moment when the airplane crashed in the ancient turquoise mine.

The squaw's face was broad, her cheek-bones high, her deep-set eyes expressionless. More than this, she was very fat and waddled as she walked. Withal, her movements were singularly swift and quiet, and she was scrupulously clean. Being the mother of Spirit of the Eagle would account for that. He had established a porcelain tub, purchased through a well-known mail-order house, into which he commanded the members of his family to project themselves frequently. They groaned at the task of heating so much water on the primitive stove, but in proper squaw fashion, obeyed.

It was not possible to find a trained nurse for Jacques. Mr. Euwer phoned to the hospital in Santa Fé, with no result.

Charlie appeared with his stolid-faced, calm mother.

'She is a good nurse,' the Indian explained. 'No fuss, no noise. At night, I come. We get along all right.'

So it had been arranged. By day Maid-Sit-In-Sun—probably this accounted for her enormous size!—watched beside the unconscious man; by night, Mr. Euwer, Charlie the Indian, and Sam Price stood guard. Gray Lawrence's vacation was at an end; he had returned to his business in New York.

The noted specialist from San Francisco, called by Mr. Euwer and paid out of his scanty resources, examined Jacques.

'I find him suffering from shock. It is not necessary, in fact,

it would be useless to operate now. A very delicate organization, I judge, temperamental. What's his business?'

'He's at present the pilot of an airplane, but by profession he is a violinist.'

'I thought so, musician. Strung up as tightly as the strings of his instrument. I know the type. Of course, he is bruised, but no bones are broken. Nothing but complete rest is needed. Although I'll say frankly, Mr. Euwer, that he may sink away in his sleep sometime. Better notify his relatives. Or he may revive suddenly. As I understand, he is quite alone, and has no relatives, except possibly in France.'

The physician went away. Each day, Hester went into the room to see whether there was anything she could do. The squaw always shook her head. There was no change.

Jacques' chin was now covered with a soft black beard. This and the long black hair waving back from his forehead contrasted in a ghastly way with the extreme pallor of his sunken cheeks. His eyes had fallen deep into their sockets, his nostrils were pinched, his lips compressed. Thirty-five years old, a gifted, brilliant man, full of life, active, passionate; now he lay helpless, apparently as much a wreck physically and mentally as the large bird-machine, lying with a broken wing, among the vari-coloured rocks.

Mr. Beetham still slept at the camp which he and Jacques had constructed. Charlie the Indian became his companion, showing him the intricate passages leading into the mine. Charlie had grown very friendly. Together they searched the ancient turquoise mine. Except the one stone picked up by the archaeologist on the night—or rather, morning—of the accident, they found nothing.

The Sheriff, having disposed of Tim at Mr. Euwer's and sent Pedro the Mexican to the Penitentiary where he belonged, was keeping close watch on two men who, he suspected, belonged to the gang of illicit distillers.

One day toward the end of September, he rode up to Mr. Lawrence's house with Josiah. They tramped up on to the vine-hung porch and sat down, twisting their hats in long, stained fingers.

'Them fellers, Miss Virginny, hes set up another still somewherees, but I ain't able to find out sure about it. Whisky is a circulatin' free. Tim won't tell on 'em an' I kinda like him fer it, but it makes things hard fer us.'

Virginia agreed that it did.

'Father says that we must go east very soon, Sheriff. He's sold this place, you know.'

'I heard he hed. Sorry you're goin'. I never thought that a woman could have such a head on her ez you got.'

'Thank you, Sheriff. Perhaps you don't know much about girls of to-day.'

'Seen a good sight o' wimmin in our time, ain't we, Josiah?'

Josiah nodded. He swallowed nervously.

Never before had he seen Virginia as she was this morning, the riding breeches, trim flannel blouse and short jacket replaced by an adorable *negligée* of filmy silk and lace, floating around her lightly. Her pale gold hair, freshly curled, haloed a sweet face in which two eyes of deep brown regarded him, and red lips smiled. And this was the girl who carried a pistol by government consent, and bore the badge of a Federal officer! 'By gum, times is changin',' thought Josiah, swallowing very hard.

'Queer things is happenin', Miss Virginny,' went on the Sheriff. 'Them men is smart, an' they're tryin' to aggeravate me. T'other day, on the jail door was stuck a big printed placard. Here it is. "Down with the law." Them is sentiments what ought to put 'em *inside* the jail.'

Josiah nodded.

'I went up to see thet aryplane yesterday an' look over thet smashed still while keepin' an eye out fer this gang an' on

the wing hung another piece o' pasteboard, "Down with the Law." Sam Price told me thet he found one nailed on Mr. Euwer's garage early one day. He didn't tell the boss, though. He's got a lot to worry him with that young feller lyin' there half dead, an' they say he's hevin' some private troubles.'

'Did Sam Price give you any information, Sheriff?'

'No. Only said he was positive thet none o' Euwer's men was in on this job. I'm suspicious of two fellers over to La Palomba, but I can't ketch 'em. Come on, Josiah, we'd better be gittin' on.'

'Thank you for coming to report,' said Virginia rising.

'Thought ye ort to know, Miss Virginny, seein' you're one o' Uncle Sam's agents. Want me to call ye ef somethin' comes up?'

'Indeed I do. I want to be in at the finish and hope it will come before we leave on the tenth of October.'

'Might be at night,' the Sheriff hesitated. 'Ain't a good thing fer a gal to be scootin' around this country alone, specially while there's varmints like these about. "Down with the law!" Where'd any of us be at ef there wa'n't no law, I'd like to know? We may not like thet law, but it's thar anyhow.'

'I'll get Charlie or somebody to go with me,' answered Virginia. 'Father is in San Francisco, and I'm here alone with my aunt. Call me up, Sheriff, and I'll come at once.'

Her voice carried clearly on the crisp, high air. Around the corner of the porch, a man was pruning some shrubs. He did not raise his head, but smiled.

'When she got up an' moved,' the entranced Josiah confided to the Sheriff when they were riding away, 'it smelled jest like vi'llets in spring back in Maine.'

'Ye'd better begin writin' po'try, Josiah,' commented the Sheriff, contemptuously.

About five o'clock on an afternoon two days later, Virginia sat reading. Near her was her aunt. The telephone rang shrilly.

'Thet you, Miss Virginny? I'm the Sheriff.'

'Yes, Sheriff. Got any news?'

'Good news. We're on to 'em, li'ble to make a ketch any minnit. You come towards that place where the aryplane fell; where the road forks turn to the right 'stead of left, and go on to the big cottonwood-tree.'

'I know,' answered Virginia.

'Then you wait there fer me. Git Charlie ef ye kin, but I see him agoin' off this mornin' with that man what's buggy on old stones. Ye needn't be afeard, though. I'll git thar afore it's dark.'

'All right,' said Virginia. 'That didn't sound like the Sheriff's voice,' she thought, turning away from the phone, 'but it must have been he. Nobody else knows about this business.'

'What was it, dear?' asked her aunt.

'The Sheriff wants me to meet him. He thinks he's got hold of some of the moonshiners. I must go at once.'

'I wish you wouldn't, Virginia. Your father wouldn't like it.'

'He'd want me to do my duty, Auntie. I'm a Federal officer, you know.'

'It's dangerous, Jinny. Oh, why do women get mixed up in all these things?'

Virginia laughed over her shoulder as she went away to change into her riding clothes.

'Men and women are equal now. If we accept the rights of citizenship we must not shirk the responsibilities.'

Her face was grave as she put her little pistol into her rear pocket and glanced at her badge to give her courage. That did not sound like the Sheriff's voice. But the style of language was his, and no one else would have spoken of Charlie or an appointment to meet. Besides, the voice over the phone was always distorted.

Virginia decided that it was no use to try to find Charlie. Mr. Beetham had told her that he and the Indian were going

many miles away to hunt up some old mines. It was still light. If the Sheriff did not arrive at the cottonwood-tree before the sudden darkness fell, she would come home. It was unwise to run too much risk, as the Sheriff and not she was responsible for the arrests.

Having assured her aunt of her speedy return or a phone message, she kissed her, told her not to worry and went away in a little runabout. Gray had gone east in his car and her father took the other large machine to San Francisco.

The whole country seemed to be deserted. Far, far away were plumes of bluish smoke floating lazily toward the north on a gentle south wind. The Indian pueblo rose, clifflike, against a sky bluer than the engraved turquoise which Hester hung about her neck as a pendant. Nearing the ravine, Virginia heard water dashing over rocks in its depths.

Off on the left was Mr. Beetham's tent. Virginia rode around to inspect it.

'Just as I thought. They are gone for the day.'

She found the fork in the road, and, according to the suggestions over the phone, supposedly from the Sheriff, she turned her car to the right, going away from the old crater with the wounded airplane and the smashed still. It was a road little used, and the car bounced and jolted. Virginia knew it, she had come this way before; recognizing the tall cottonwood-tree, she stopped beneath its shade, grateful for its coolness in the glare of rock and sand.

'Not a soul around. I may as well read until the Sheriff and Josiah get here.'

A few feet on one side, one of these peculiarly formed rocks rose abruptly into the air. It was of deep red stone, a monolith almost as exact as if it had been hewn by a chisel, so accurately had nature formed and sharpened it during the ages.

An immense black bird arose from the crevices of this rock, apparently startled by something. It wheeled around, dipping

its heavy wings in the ether, encircling the little car. Virginia's eyes left the book to observe the bird. It gave her a queer feeling, this black bird with huge beak and bleary eyes, it seemed to be leering at her. Very slowly it flew, then settled again on the deep red rock.

It was a vulture, evil bird of prey, watching, watching—

'If he doesn't come soon, I'll go home. The sun will soon set. I don't see anything of the Sheriff's car, or hear a sound of its humming.'

Virginia, in spite of her officer's badge, was getting nervous. She forced her eyes back on the page. As she did so, two men crept out from the shadow of the rock. Slipping behind some sage-brush they were able to approach the rear of the car without attracting her attention.

'Now!' whispered one.

Virginia looked up, startled, into a masked face. The man had bright red hair. His hand lacked a thumb and first finger.

'Shut up, girl!' This from the second man. 'We won't hurt ye, but we got ye now. We'll teach you women to mind yer own bizness.'

Virginia wondered why she was not more frightened. She coolly watched the men bind her with heavy ropes; how could that one with no thumb and finger be so expert! She had seen a hand like that. She knew who he was!

'Ain't no need to gag her,' said this man. 'She's a pretty good sort anyway. We're sorry, Miss, to do this, but we gotta stick to our rights an' you're a-interferin' with 'em. I'll jest take yer badge; might come in handy. An' thet cunnin' little pistol, lady's kind. Government must be short o' men when they begin to make gal-officers.'

The men both laughed.

They lifted her from the car and laid her down by the sage-brush.

'Ye kin git one hand out, Miss, an' we left ye some bread an'

a bottle o' coffee. Somebody will come along in a day or two an' pick ye up an' no harm done, but we're a-showin' them blamed Sheriff them we mean bizness. Gimme them stick.'

The other man handed him a tall pointed stick which he sank into the earth. Virginia could read the placard at the top.

'DOWN WITH THE LAW.'

The sound of the runabout into which the men mounted, died away. The sun sank below the horizon. On the top of the purpling rock sat the vulture, watching—watching—

XIX

HESTER'S FUTURE CHANGES

WONG brought the tea-table and placed it in front of Hester, seated in one of the weather-worn wicker chairs on the broad, shaded veranda of the ranch-house. The lawns, under the care of Sam Price and his new helper, Tim from Ohio, were smooth as velvet. Beyond grazed about fifty sheep. In a pasture were the two cows which provided milk and butter for the family. In the distance was spread the vast plateau, with groups of rocks rising at intervals. The plateau was yellow and red, a wide expanse of almost level ground.

Hester watched Wong move back and forth, bringing a large silver tray laden with very delicate and rare old English china. The contrasts of the home in New Mexico never failed to intrigue her. Rude logs for outside walls, very shabby furniture, some of it home-made, rugs of rude Indian weaving; but Cousin Leonard insisted on the constant use of china and silver, the remnants of former prosperity, so fine that they might well have been placed behind glass doors as museum pieces.

Wong was exceedingly careful, every dish was washed by his own pointed yellow fingers, and put in its position in the carved cabinets in the living-room. These were a few of the choice articles possessed by this baffling cousin. Baffling he was. Strongly religious in character, living up to his ideals, gentle, kind, courageous, Leonard Euwer was also firm, severe toward the sin, merciful to the sinner. A man of contrasts, just as his house was.

Of his former life, his reasons for leaving England, of his

comparative poverty he never spoke. One sentence in the letter which he had written to Major Hugh Euwer, Hester's father, was the nearest revelation that he had made.

'As you know, my romance was shattered over in the Old Country. I left it behind me and crossed the ocean that I might forget. One does not forget, but the wound is healed over, only occasionally does it open, for I am busy and, except that I have none of our kin near me, happy in my work.'

'You'll have tea, Virginia?'

'Yes, with lemon, please.'

Virginia took the cup which the Honorable Mr. Beetham offered her and smiled at him.

Cousin Leonard came up the steps.

'If you'll excuse my working clothes, Hester, I'd like some tea. Virginia, I'm glad to see you looking so well after your experience the other night. Yes, Hester, I'll have some sandwiches, everything you've got. I didn't have time to get any lunch.'

'You oughtn't to work so hard, Cousin Leonard.'

'I must, my dear. Beetham, tell me how you found Virginia.'

'With Charlie. I was returning from a long day's jaunt. It was dark, about eight o'clock, I think. It was the Indian who heard the sound first, his ears were keener than mine. "Some woman is calling," he said. We were on horseback, so we drew rein and I heard, distinctly, but very far away, a cry for help. It—er—disturbed me very much.'

Mr. Beetham moved his monocle, carefully wiped it on a bit of chamois-skin, and set it, precisely, in position. It was his way of saying that he was agitated. The monocle was always a criterion of the archaeologist's moods. When he forgot this constant companion and left it dangling, it was a sure sign that he was very much upset and excited.

Cousin Leonard and Hester exchanged a comprehending smile.

' We followed the sound, going considerably out of our way, stopping every once in a while to listen. And then—er—we found Virginia, lying on the ground, her feet securely bound, one arm fastened to her side, the other free, but the knots were so arranged that she could not possibly reach them. Evidently the rascals had no intention of being cruel, though they did leave her alone in a deserted country. She—er—was very brave—'

Virginia sat up straight. Her eyes were beautifully soft, deeply dark, her cheeks, usually colourless, were richly tinted. She reached out and grasped Mr. Beetham's hand.

' I'll tell you the rest. It was terribly lonely when the darkness fell, but I did not feel really frightened, though maybe I was. The stars were very bright and a tiny crescent of moon gave a faint light, you know how it is out here, there's always something luminous in the air, even at night. I was hungry and remembered what the man said about leaving bread and a bottle of coffee. It was there all right and I ate it. After that I felt better. Really, I think that I was sleepy, and I might have resigned myself to staying all night, with hope that somebody would come along in the morning, or I might be able to loosen the ropes and walk home, if that wretched bird on the rock hadn't opened out his wings. It occurred to me that they wait around that way, when—when somebody is lost in the desert.'

' Bird? ' queried Hester.

' Vulture,' answered Mr. Beetham, his voice hoarse.

' That got on my nerves and suddenly I was desperate. I must get away! I pulled at the ropes and they got tighter, they cut me. And then I screamed for help. The scream seemed to come back to me as if the stillness was a wall.'

Mr. Beetham smoothed the hand that clasped his. He had become very human indeed.

' We heard her and came.'

Virginia laughed, very sweetly.

'While I'm at it, I may as well tell everything. They cut my bands and I fell on Mr. Beetham, just flung my arms around his neck.'

'Clearly,' thought Hester, now amused, 'when Virginia lets herself go, she does it thoroughly.'

'And I wept on his shoulder, quarts of tears, and he didn't seem to mind the deluge one bit. He—he kissed me and he said right out, and Charlie could hear every word distinctly, I know, "And now, dear, there's been enough of this business"—real masterful was Mr. Beetham—'

Mr. Beetham laughed, as though he was enjoying this narration. Imagine—the Honourable George Beetham!

"Enough of this business," he said, "so now I'll take you to Africa with me, where you can hunt wild beasts with a camera."

Hester opened her mouth to say, 'Why, I never thought you would'—and wisely closed it again.

Virginia was undoubtedly going to marry the archaeologist and help him find the ruins on which his heart was set, for she added, 'So I said, "All right, darling, I'll go anywhere with you,"' and I kissed him right in front of Charlie's eyes. I couldn't see whether he blinked, but being calm, I doubt if he did.'

Congratulations followed, and soon Virginia rode away, taking her fiancé with her.

Cousin Leonard remained on the veranda, while Wong carried away the tray, assisted by bare-footed José, the half-breed.

'That's news, isn't it, Hester? Beetham told me this morning, but I haven't seen you since. He's very happy about it and so, I judge, is Virginia. I never saw her so animated. I want to talk to you, Hester, if you have time.'

'I always have time to do anything you want me to, Cousin Leonard.' Hester sat down on the step beside his chair, and

looked up at him smiling. ‘ You know how happy you have made me, and that I love you almost as dearly as I loved father. This home, too, how much it has meant to me! ’

He laid his hand gently on her bright hair, then turned her face upward so that he could look into her eyes as he talked.

‘ He certainly is worried about something,’ decided Hester. ‘ I wonder what it can be.’

‘ You’re pale, Hester dear, and you’ve grown thin since that adventure in the airplane.’

This was the first reference made by Cousin Leonard to that night when she left La Palomba with Jacques Dufour. She had been grateful for his considerate silence.

‘ I’m all right, Cousin Leonard.’

Hester made her voice cheerful; she was far from being cheerful. During these days when Jacques lay so quietly in the guest-room, in the uncertainty of life or death, she had found much to think about.

‘ You had a bad shock, and your nerves are shaken. It is not surprising. So I want you to go East with Virginia, she’ll be glad to have you stay with her awhile, and then you can go to your friend Constance in New York—you told me that she has urged you to visit her.’

Hester’s heart gave a great throb. To go East, to see again the hills of Vermont, they would be gorgeous in autumn glory now—to see Bell Inn and those dear people, Mr. and Mrs. Dodd—and Jack; if she only could go!

‘ I’m not going away without you, Cousin Leonard.’

‘ I expect to be in New York myself in December, Hester.’

‘ You! How can you leave the ranch? ’

‘ The ranch will leave me. Mr. Beetham will buy it.’ He told me so this morning. Lawrence has disposed of his home, Virginia likes it here, and Beetham finds it a section rich in the investigations he wishes to make. After they return from Africa, he will take possession. They are to be married in

Burlington before Christmas and will stay away a year. I hope that you will not feel badly because the ranch is sold, Hester. Beetham gives a good price for it, almost more than it is worth.'

'Feel badly!' The blood was dancing in Hester's veins. She had been happy here, but life would grow monotonous and Virginia and Gray would not be here. It was lonely, though she had never allowed herself to acknowledge it.

'If you think it is what you want to do, Cousin Leonard, I am satisfied,' she permitted herself to say. 'But what shall we do when we do not own the ranch?'

'Oh, I'll find a job somewhere,' he answered, lightly. 'I'm not so very old yet and we'll have some money, not very much, but a little income, and I thought we might settle near Burlington. Lawrence may have something for me in the bank.'

Brave Cousin Leonard!

'You see, dear, I haven't been able to make the ranch pay. All my capital went into it, and I fancy I wasn't cut out for a ranchman. We'll only have the income from what Beetham pays, to live on.'

'I'll get a job,' said Hester, eagerly. 'If you had not given me this lovely home, I should have had to earn my living. We'll work together, Cousin Leonard. I'll keep house for you and we'll have lots of fun.'

Cousin Leonard could not speak. He smoothed her hair with a hand that trembled. 'I might have known that she was this kind of a girl,' he thought.

'Oh, Cousin Leonard! What about Jacques? We can't all go and leave him here alone.'

'Of course not. The doctor says that if he does not show signs of consciousness within two weeks, he must be taken to Santa Fé and placed in the hospital. As a last resort, he will be operated on, but it will be such a serious operation that they want to avoid it, if possible. As a matter of fact, the specialist from San Francisco thought that he could not survive it, or if

he did, might be mentally deranged. His condition seems to be more cataleptic than organic. Being peculiarly sensitive and temperamental, this condition may be aggravated in his case. By long rest, nature may be healing him.'

'I'll go and stay with him so that Maid-Sit-in-Sun can go and do it for a while. Such a funny name!'

'Yes, the Indians are idealists, expressing themselves in imagery. I am much pleased with the way that Charlie is developing. The effects of those years at the school in Oklahoma are shown. He has asked Beetham to lend him some books on mining, and especially the history of turquoises. Beetham says that Charlie believes that the stones can still be found among the rocks of that old crater. Well, Sheriff, come up and sit down. How are you, Josiah?'

'Fine, Mr. Euwer!' The Sheriff took off his hat to salute Hester, standing by the door leading to the living-room.

'We got them men, Mr. Euwer. This time they'll git put where they can't do no more law-breakin'.'

Mr. Euwer glanced anxiously at the Sheriff's large-featured face.

'Any more of mine among them?'

'No, sir, n'ary a one. Way we come to git 'em is because Miss Virginny noticed that one o' them men that tied her up hed lost a thumb an' finger. She knew him, too. Worked all summer on the Lawrence place. Come from Nevady an' is a bad lot. We give him considerable rope an' he hung himself like they most always does. Then he turned on his pals.'

'I congratulate you, Sheriff.'

'It was really Miss Virginny. I was on the wrong track entirely before them men held her up. The fellers I and Josiah thought was up to mischief is ez innercent ez them dumb sheep a'grazin' out yender.'

Josiah nodded, twisting his hat in his calloused hands.

'I never see a gal like her. While they was a'tyin' her up to

leave her all alone in a place that would ha' skeered a brave man—it was only a chancet that anybody would come by—she kept her head an' noticed that his hand was crippled. She's an honour to the force, Mr. Euwer.'

'Mr. Beetham has bought this ranch, Sheriff.'

'You don't say!'

'It is no secret that he and Miss Lawrence will soon be married and some time they will return here.'

Josiah gave a short, hoarse laugh. The Sheriff regarded him sternly and he changed it into a cough.

'Well, I ruther imagined there was somethin' up between her an' that stone-man—Mr. Beetham, I mean. Folks around here calls him that, because he's always pokin' among the rocks.'

'He is a very distinguished man in his profession, Sheriff, an archaeologist. I understand that he possesses a large fortune.'

'Hmm. That's good. Some older'n her, ain't he?'

'About fifteen years, I believe.'

'Well, ef she's suited, it ain't none of our affairs. No accountin' fer tastes, ez the man said when he saw the Mexicans eatin' snails. Come on, Josiah. Now, Mr. Euwer, we're goin' to miss ye a lot when ye leave the ranch. Ain't goin' away fer good, be ye?'

'Going East, Sheriff.'

'Good luck to ye. Say, Mr. Euwer,' there was a whimsical twist to the Sheriff's thin lips and an appeal in his tone, 'ye ain't plannin' to bail none o' these whisky fellers out, be ye? An' reform 'em? I tell ye, this gang ain't even wuth reformin'.'

Mr. Euwer smiled.

'I suppose we can scarcely tell when a man has sunk so low that he cannot be helped, but I assure you that I have no intention of interfering with the course of justice in this case. No doubt, they deserve all they will get.'

The Sheriff sighed with relief.

'Pleased to hear ye say that, sir. Sam Price an' Tim was good timber underneath the scum they'd gethered by gittin' in bad company, an' you've done some good jobs by prayin' a lot o' folks out o' their sins, but now——'

'Good-bye, Sheriff. See you again before I leave.'

Hester motioned to the squaw to leave Jacques' room. Charlie's mother lumbered out noiselessly; for so large a woman she moved with surprising grace and lightness. She was an excellent nurse, devoted and much more intelligent than one would have imagined, to look at her broad face with its heavy, coarse features. Her eyes were bright and observant.

Now that there seemed to be no crisis expected, the men were no longer in attendance at night. The Indian woman slept on a couch, rising at intervals to force milk or soup into her patient's mouth. He swallowed without difficulty, the only sign of life except regular breathing and an occasional movement of his hands.

Hester looked down at him in deep pity. He was much emaciated, cheeks sunken and pale. His features were like those of a marble statue. The hands which had so expertly wielded a bow or guided an airplane lay on the coverlet, thin almost to transparency.

It did not seem possible that this could be the man who had called her by his music—or his will—to the trout-pool, who had so appealed to her emotions through the same medium in the studio at La Palomba, bringing them both to disaster in the old turquoise mine—active, brilliant, enticing, even lovable Jacques Dufour, now weak, unconscious, perhaps on the verge of passing into that eternity in which he had no belief whatever.

Again, as she had done many times, she asked herself why this man had been able to influence her in this manner. Was it, as he had said, that she 'had a little devil' in her which responded to the tempter in his nature? Was it the fascination

of love, that mysterious element? Love was of God, not of the Evil One.

She was greatly puzzled and disturbed. Cousin Leonard thought that it was the accident which had unnerved her; it was not altogether that, but something much more intricate, a constant study of her inner feelings, an effort to analyse the peculiar experiences through which she had passed, psychical experiences the scientists called them.

But were they psychical and not spiritual? If spiritual, there must be a remedy. If Jacques arose now from that bed, lifted his violin and played in that old manner, causing her to see visions, would she follow where he led?

Where was the remedy to be found? Only through the aid of a power greater than that which influenced her through Jacques. She acknowledged that such power must be divine, or it could not prevail.

XX

THE FIRST NUGGET

FROM that day on Hester commenced her search for that power. Perhaps she would find it in the Scriptures. A phrase read by Cousin Leonard that evening when they were all gathered in the living-room at twilight, caught her attention—‘Search the Scriptures.’

Hester always liked these quiet services, though, usually, she paid little heed to either reading or prayer. The soft light, the calm, soothed her restless spirit. It was a restless spirit; for though she had made every effort to be satisfied on the ranch, had appreciated the generosity and love shown her by her cousin, there were moments when she rebelled. Now, she was eager for change, for excitement, for life. ‘I’m young, young, I want to see what waits for me around the corner.’

Search the Scriptures. That meant read them carefully, try to get into their essence, their meaning. Search involved finding. Mr. Beetham searched for turquoises in the ancient mine; he would not stop searching until he knew whether there actually were any of the semi-precious stones there.

The worn leather Bible lay on the stand beside her bed in its customary place. She never opened it, keeping it close to her because her mother’s hands—that mother whom she never knew, whose face was familiar only through her miniature—had touched it. Also, from a superstitious idea that there was some charm in the Book to protect her.

Hester decided to read the New Testament through, very slowly. How else could she search? In the mine, looking for bits of turquoise, the archaeologist and Spirit of the Eagle went over it step by step, searching. So would she do, reading verse by verse, weighing words and phrases.

That night, she read the first chapter of Matthew, finding one nugget of pure gold, ‘Thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.’

As she laid herself down to consider this nugget in its relation to her, personally, she mused, ‘Mother loved this book. She read it often, for it is worn and marked. If she had lived, perhaps she could have shown me how to search and find.’

The days passed very quickly, for there was much to do, both for herself, though her belongings had increased little since the day when she packed her trunks in Constance’s beautiful apartment, and for Cousin Leonard, also. His clothes needed mending, they were very old, indeed. He kept himself so scrupulously groomed, and his suits, shabby as they were, so immaculate and well-pressed, that he always looked what he was, the perfect type of a gentleman.

Leonard Euwer came in one day to find her frowning over an old tweed coat. Inside was the label of a London tailor.

‘Cousin Leonard, as soon as you go East you’ll have to get some new clothes. You can’t get a job without them.’

‘I suppose you’re right, Hester. Speaking of clothes, Beetham has paid part of the purchase money. I’m to give him the deed in a fortnight. Here’s a cheque for you. Three hundred. Will that be enough for you to buy those things you’ll need?’

Hester dropped the old coat and flung herself upon him.

‘You’re such a dear, Cousin Leonard! I hate to go away and leave you here, even for these few weeks. And I won’t take the money—I won’t! As soon as I get to Burlington I’ll write to Paul Fitz-Maurice and he’ll get me a job in New York. I won’t buy a stitch of clothes until I earn the money. You, sacrificing so that I can have pretty things when you’re wearing suits you brought from England!’

‘Don’t cry, my lass.’ Cousin Leonard’s voice was tremulous.

'Do you think that I haven't known that you needed new dresses? Virginia came with pretty, dainty clothes, and you did not make a sign that you felt badly, wearing things Constance Fitz-Maurice gave you three years ago.'

Hester hid her face in his rough coat. She had thought that Cousin Leonard did not notice!

'I've had so little ready money; didn't dare spend. I'm not a successful rancher,' he continued.

'Yes, you are,' came a muffled, loyal voice from the coat.

He laughed happily, and gave her an affectionate hug.

'You don't know what you've meant to me, dear, pulling me out of the slough of despond, coming in your youth and beauty. Please God, we'll face the future with courage and hope. This money is a refund for what I paid the specialist who came to see Jacques. He has a good-sized account in Lawrence's bank in Burlington, and every expense will be paid, though I should have been glad to bear it all, had I been able. So take this, my daughter, and buy pretty clothes that girls like, I know.'

Going East was a delight, in Mr. Lawrence's car, guided by his chauffeur, who had accompanied the banker and his daughter from Burlington. Gray had come out directly from New York. No hasty lunch of fruit and scant dinner in the hot diner now; they stopped along the way at comfortable hotels, eating sumptuously, served by obsequious waiters. At first, Hester was alarmed. Most of the three hundred dollars given her by Cousin Leonard would melt away at this rate of living.

When she offered to pay her share, Mr. Lawrence waved her aside.

'You are my guest, my dear, so long as you are with us.'

So Hester settled down in the soft cushions of her corner seat in the luxurious machine, smiling. 'May as well enjoy life while I have the chance. When I get to work there won't be any more of this.'

As his cousin speeded eastward, Mr. Euwer busied himself

in preparations for his own departure early in December. Almost two months remained before he was obliged to vacate Pepper Tree Ranch, although the deed would soon be given to Mr. Beetham, now his guest. The camp was broken up, the tents stored over the garage.

Each day Charlie, the Indian, came, and with Mr. Euwer and his new employer, learned his new job of general overseer. Very apt he proved to be, surprisingly quick of comprehension, saying little, but grasping details.

'What do you want done with the airplane, Mr. Beetham?' he asked on one of these visits.

'I'm going to have it repaired by a firm in San Francisco. Then it will be shipped East so that I can take it with me to Africa. We expect to do our journeying by air. I had hoped that I could persuade Dufour to go with me as pilot, but shall have to find someone else.'

'A great age, isn't it, Beetham?'

'This modern age? It's wonderful, not only in invention, though. The character of people has changed. I am a sincere admirer of the youth of to-day, their initiative, their energy, and fearlessness. I like, too, the way they think, reasoning out problems for themselves.'

'They believe only what they can see or feel,' Leonard Euwer said dubiously.

'In a way, yes. But at heart they are sweet and sound. Once convinced of truth, they lift the banner and march bravely onward in the face of any danger. That's an element which I deeply admire in them. It was one of Miss Lawrence's first attractions. She was convinced that she was needed in an important enterprise, upholding the laws of her country, and boldly determined to do her part. My mother could not have done this, my sister would hesitate to face a band of men who stop at nothing, who tie up women and leave them out in the night in a lonely waste, perhaps to die.'

Mr. Beetham hurriedly removed his monocle and wiped his eyes; he had become exceedingly human.

He continued, 'But a young girl dares to face the evil. It's a great age, indeed, Euwer, and I'm proud to have a place in it.'

Charlie had gone away. The two men walked slowly around the garden. The asters were gone; lacy chrysanthemums of deep pink, dull rose, russet and gold reared their proud heads. The air was fragrant with an odour resembling incense, the offering of earth's flowers to their Creator.

'What about the young man in yonder?'

'The doctor thinks that the risk must be taken. Next week he will take Jacques to the hospital. The operation is such a delicate one that they hold out little hope of its success. I favour delay. His colour is more natural, his breathing more quiet than it was. My idea is that he should remain here until I leave and we'll see what happens.'

'You've been very good to him, Euwer.'

'Good! Why shouldn't I be? He's just one of my little brothers.'

The archaeologist looked at the little man in the shabby old clothes, sitting now on a rustic seat under a drooping pepper-tree, his rather womanish hands clasped behind his head. Full of affection were Mr. Beetham's light-blue eyes, wont to be hard and glacial as the minerals and stones which he loved.

Leonard Euwer's head was almost entirely bald, he bore the Euwer nose, large and thick, but distinctive, his mouth had a decided twist to one side, but his eyes were illumined by a light akin to that of the stars.

Mr. Beetham swallowed hard and cleared his throat. In Rome he had seen a copy of that early portrait of Christ found in the Catacombs. The artist had elaborated those crude, primitive outlines, benignity, grace, gentleness were there and the eyes—Leonard Euwer's had it, too—were illumined

from within, a spiritual light shining through from a pure soul.

' You have many little brothers, my friend. The ex-convicts and Sam Price call you brother, and many others.'

' Have we not the same Father? '

Where other men side-stepped religion, or God, or Christ, Euwer talked as freely about them as though he referred to the weather. His entire existence circled around spiritual elements. So visible was this that those who met him might reverently have paraphrased the words of the Master when he said, ' He that hath seen him, hath seen the Christ.'

The squaw was approaching. Her long red skirt was full, accentuating her size, around her fat neck, falling over a white jacket, hung a double string of quaintly-carved beads. Mr. Beetham's glance fastened, true to type, on these as he wondered whether he could persuade her to part with them. Virginia would like to have them. Black hair, very smoothly braided, was banded around her large head. Her beady eyes sparkled.

' Must go. Boy sick, Charlie say. Come back,' she motioned to the sun now at its zenith, then to a point half-way to the horizon.

' All right. I'll sit by your patient. She'll be back about three o'clock, she says. I'll go and stay with Jacques. Wong will bring my lunch there.'

' And here come those men from San Francisco to look over that wrecked plane. I'll see you at dinner, Euwer,' Mr. Beetham responded.

Taking the newspaper and a couple of books, Mr. Euwer went to Jacques' room, and after standing beside the unconscious man for a few moments, sat down by the window to read.

He had never made any effort to find out what happened during or before the airplane flight. It was not in Leonard Euwer's nature to force a confidence. So long as Hester

wished to keep her secret, whatever it might be, she had a right to be silent, especially when it involved no problem except one which she must solve. This case was very simple; she had gone away with Jacques and the plane had fallen. The results to the pilot had been disastrous, and might cause his death.

What the results were to Hester, he could only surmise. She had been manifestly nervous, a very natural sequence to such an accident; also, unusually affectionate toward him, eager to offer a service, more thoughtful of others.

As he sat in the quiet chamber, he wondered whether Hester had intended to fly away with Jacques through the storm and leave him and Pepper Tree Ranch for ever. Perhaps she loved this attractive, fascinating young man, superlatively gifted but, Mr. Euwer was sure, somewhat cruel and exceedingly selfish and self-indulgent.

Leonard Euwer knew the world, and behind his insignificant exterior, judged men and women with keen, almost unerring instinct. Because of this quality he had been able to draw and hold the respect of the decidedly disreputable characters with whom he had surrounded himself.

Hester had not acted as if she was at all in love with Jacques Dufour. On the contrary her cousin had been impressed by a certain fear which she exhibited whenever Jacques was present. He had observed her intense expression while the musician played in the studio. It was not love which inspired this expression; rather the fascination which a rabbit feels when hypnotized by a gold and black snake. Leonard Euwer was susceptible himself, he could understand why this young girl of his blood should be thus attracted by the vivid, entrancing music.

Once there had been such a man in their own family. The legend survived that when he played in the forest, young men and women ran from the villages around and did his bidding, and the animals came forth from their hiding-places in holes and rocks to listen. The report was that he had made a bargain

with Beelzebub, who led him at last to his doom in a raging torrent.

Of course, this was all nonsense, but there had been a Sir Guy Euwer—the baronetcy had been established by Queen Elizabeth as a reward for some favour done her by a country gentleman—who was extraordinarily gifted in music, very peculiar and possessed at times by blind rages. In one of these fits of passion, it was said, he ran toward a cliff and threw himself down into the river. His body was never found. In the parish church, near Euwer Manor, there was a brass tablet inscribed with the name of this Sir Guy, with the dates.

From this, Leonard Euwer began to think about the Manor and old Sir Hugh, he must be over eighty now; fine, straight man he had been when Leonard said good-bye to him as head of the family on his departure for America twenty years before. Twenty years, a long time, and he had not made a success, he was a poor man yet. For himself, he did not care; very little money was sufficient for his wants, but with Hester, it was different. He wished that he had a fortune to give her, and sighed.

His head fell back on the chair, and he dozed in the quiet and heat of noon. Wong roused him, bringing a tray of lunch, a soup, salad, biscuits, and fruit. Mr. Euwer ate, wondering whether he ought to force any nourishment into Jacques' mouth. He should have asked Charlie's mother about this.

Wong appeared again, bore away the dishes, and Mr. Euwer, after a short walk up and down the room, rested again by the window. Strange how the man could lie there, not hearing, nor seeing, nor feeling! Was he thinking? In the silences of his withdrawal from active existence, was the brain weaving phantasies which would interest a psychologist?

Glancing a few moments later at Jacques, Mr. Euwer sat as if petrified, seeing great black eyes, their sombreness increased by the hollow sockets, wide open, staring at him.

XXI

A STARTLING QUESTION

JACQUES stretched out his arms, a sign of reviving animation.

‘Is Hester dead?’ he asked.

‘No, Hester is well,’ Mr. Euwer hastened to assure him. The unbelievable had happened; Jacques would live. ‘She has gone East with Mr. Lawrence and Virginia.’

Jacques sighed with relief.

‘I’ve seen her dead, in my dreams, and it was all my fault—all mine. Hester wasn’t to blame at all. I took her away, wanted her to fly with me to the ends of the earth. I remember—’

A great sob seized him, tears rolled down the white cheeks.

Mr. Euwer grasped the situation firmly. Though his knees shook (he had been greatly startled) he went to the side of the bed and patted Jacques’ shoulder.

‘You must stop this. Nothing is the matter with Hester. She forgave you long ago.’ (Oh, if I could only get to the ’phone and call up the doctor!)

Jacques’ attention was caught. He turned a little and grew quiet.

‘Long ago? How long have I been here?’

‘About six weeks.’

‘Six weeks! The dreams—they have been so terrible. I saw her dead, lying there bruised and bleeding after the plane fell—’

He was getting excited again, and Euwer did not dare to leave him. He must get the doctor. Why did that squaw have to go

away to-day, just when she was needed? And Wong was in the kitchen far away, he could not call him.

On the table by the bed was a pitcher covered with a cloth, probably milk.

'I tell you Hester is all right,' he said distinctly. 'Look here, aren't you hungry? Here's some milk. Drink some.'

Jacques laughed hysterically.

'I'm starved. How soon can I have some steak?'

'Drink this, and I'll call up the doctor and ask him.'

Jacques obediently drank from the cup held to his lips.

'Now you lie perfectly still while I phone.'

Euwer wiped his brow, hurrying to the instrument in the living-room.

'The doctor will be up at once,' he said.

His words were not heard. Jacques had turned on his side, put an emaciated hand under his cheek, and was restfully sleeping.

Jacques' recovery was very rapid. In a week he could walk to the veranda, where he sat all day long, looking idly at the golden haze of approaching autumn hanging over rocks and plain.

'The long rest has done wonders for you,' said his host one morning.

Jacques was walking now, with the aid of a cane, pacing back and forth restlessly. The urge to move, to adventure forth again had seized him.

'How can I ever thank you, sir!' The black eyes, so varied in expression from wistfulness and a boyish affection to the sudden spark of anger or passion or complete enthralment in music which he was playing, were tender now in his gratitude.

They filled with sudden tears—for Jacques was still weak—when Mr. Euwer said cordially, 'My boy, it has been God's mercy which has saved you from death. Thank Him, not me. I am merely the instrument in His hands.'

'Yes, the instrument,' murmured Jacques, turning his gaze toward the horizon. 'While I was lying there, Mr. Euwer, my mind was filled with visions, some of them horrible.' He shuddered. 'Once, I seemed to be in the clutch of long, powerful tentacles, I could not move. Hideous eyes set in a round, jellylike body, stared at me. I wanted to scream, but I could not.'

'Do not agitate yourself, Jacques. Sit down.'

Jacques sank into the chair, covering his quivering face with his long, delicate hands, those hands which were so deft. He spoke again.

'I did not suppose that people remembered what happened in delirium, but I do, it comes to me in the night—any time. All of my visions were not so distressing, however. One day, I was in pain, every nerve was alive. Then, a cool hand seemed to rest on my head, a figure in white stood beside me, and I looked up into one of the most beautiful faces imaginable, tender, loving, compassionate. Do you remember, sir, that when our boys lay wounded on the battle-field they said that the White Comrade moved among them and ministered to them? I have thought—I am almost sure—that I saw the White Comrade in my visions.'

'It may have been, Jacques.'

'I'm not making any excuses for myself, nor promises for the future. I have lived my life in my own way, my own headlong, passionate way, and it has brought me no peace. Always, there has been a seething in my soul—I've never been sure that I had a soul; I'm not now. But there is something moving in my nature. When I looked into the face of that White Comrade, I wanted to be like him. Strange, how vividly I remember it!'

Mr. Euwer did not speak. 'Our Father, bring this poor lonely boy home,' he prayed. Leonard Euwer believed in the power of prayer.

'You've done so much for me, sir.'

'Not I; the instrument.'

'Sir, I have read the Bible. I have always been interested in religious faith as manifested in human beings and in the remarkable leaders of various religious systems who have arisen. The Veda, the Koran, the Bible; Confucius, Mohammed, Christ, I have studied them all. But I never thought of religion as personal to me until I met you. In you I've seen the spirit of Christ.'

'If to one man only I have been able to breathe forth that spirit, I am grateful.'

'Not to one, but to many. I want to tell you how Hester happened to be with me in the airplane the night of the accident. It was all my fault—all mine. I worked upon her delicate sensibilities, even when she was at Bell Inn, I knew that this was possible. In some mysterious way, we were akin, attuned to each other, but not through good, Mr. Euwer, through our evil tendencies. I could sway her—and I did.'

His hands were twisting nervously.

'Don't try to tell me anything, Jacques. I don't wish to know. Besides, it's no good for you to talk so much. The doctor would not approve.'

'I must talk. This has been too long pent up within me. I go over and over it in my mind. If there is any power which will save me from myself, sir, I want to know it. I saw Hester lie dead before me—dead. And I had killed her, had brought her to her death, had excited that spirit of evil which is inherent in each one of us. I was the tempter.'

'There is such a power, Jacques.'

'Convince me that there is, and I will devote my life, my music, my strength to telling others about it. One evening, sir, you read about the boy possessed with a devil. Jesus cast it out, and he was healed. Will you read that passage to me?'

Mr. Euwer went into the living-room, bringing out the large,

leather-bound volume, from which his father had read daily in the old home in England.

'Have you seen in Rome Raphael's painting of the Transfiguration?' Jacques asked.

'Yes.'

'You remember how, as Christ is pictured lifted from the earth, transfigured in glory, there is a little group of people in the shadows gazing upward, and among them is the lad freed from the power of the devil?'

'Here it is, Jacques.'

He read how they brought the boy unto Jesus. And Jesus said to the father, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' The father answered, 'Lord, I believe.' And the spirit came out of him. Jesus took him by the hand, and he arose, healed.

'This kind,' said Jesus, 'can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting.'

There was a long silence. Jacques spoke at last. His voice sounded muffled, as if it came from a long distance.

'Prayer and fasting. I suppose that means in our way of speaking, faith and self-denial.'

'Yes, Jacques.'

'I have lived by reason alone. Of self-denial I know nothing, have done what I pleased, taken what I wanted without regard to consequences. The power over evil then lies in Jesus Christ.'

'Yes.'

'That power is exercised because of our faith. I must believe that Jesus Christ has power to save me. Then I must develop my better nature through denying myself.'

'Precisely.'

The moment was critical; Mr. Euwer was afraid to say one word too much. Jacques was groping his way toward the light.

'It's a practical age. We young people of to-day are not

grasping the spiritual, but we long for it, Mr. Euwer. I must think this through. And, sir, I'm eternally grateful to you for showing me the way.'

Fresh air, rest, good food and an easy mind had coloured Jacques' ordinarily pale cheeks, giving him an aspect of more perfect health than he had before the accident in the airplane. An extremely attractive man was Jacques Dufour, Cousin Leonard acknowledged, and fitted to catch the admiration of a romantic girl. As to Hester, while romantic, she possessed an unusual amount of commonsense. Cousin Leonard, without expressing the thought even to himself, unconsciously banked on that commonsense.

Since that day when he had talked to Jacques on the matters of his soul, they had not referred to the subject. Jacques expected to leave for his home soon, going first, however, to San Francisco and returning to Burlington by the Canadian Pacific. He said that his tenants required a few changes in the house. Long ago he had paid John Dodd the full amount of the mortgage.

His plans, he told Mr. Euwer, were very uncertain. Sometimes he thought that he would sell the old place and go to France, to be near his uncle. Aviation still attracted him, and music; he could not make up his mind which to follow. Perhaps he would combine the two, buy an airplane and tour the world, giving concerts.

Cousin Leonard was relieved that no mention was made of Hester. Certainly, Jacques' life, if he followed this outline, was not particularly domestic. But men and their wives did, nowadays, roam the world together in an extraordinary disregard of family ties.

Jacques rode to the very point which Hester had so loved, to which she had gone, accompanied by the mastiff, Lion, that day when Charlie followed her to present her with the engraved bit of turquoise.

To the same ragged cottonwood tree he fastened Star, then sat down on the edge of the cliff. Far below spread the plain, dotted with the abruptly-rising, oddly-formed crags of red sandstone. For a long time he sat there, perfectly still. A sudden gust of wind from the mountains on the west, the snow-topped peaks which seemed so near and were such a long, long distance away, whipped his cheek. It died away. Again, the soft south breeze languorously swept up from the yellow desert. Surprisingly came the touch of chill from the east, like a breath of fog.

The spirit of creation awoke in Jacques. Taking from his pocket a small pad, he unscrewed his pen and drew five lines across it, beneath these, another group of five lines, and joined them. His eyes were brilliant with the light of inspiration. Not solely the inspiration of the genius who feels the music stirring within him, but, added to this, a new, different spirit born in him during the past few weeks.

'The Winds of God,' he wrote above the staff.

Then, rapidly, as if it came to him from some source outside of himself, Jacques, his soul aflame, rapidly sketched the *motif* of that lyric composition which was not only to make him famous, but to prove the power of music and to proclaim his new-born faith.

He hurried back to the ranch-house, declining all food—Wong found the dinner-tray which he brought to the door untouched in the morning—Jacques wrote all night long, throwing himself on the bed only when the sun shone brightly.

He had composed a masterpiece.

XXII

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE

O CTOBER passed with glowing face; came November. The time was drawing near when Mr. Euwer would leave Pepper Tree Ranch, his home for many years, in the care of Spirit of the Eagle, and would turn his face toward the East. He had missed Hester greatly. The knowledge that they would soon be together lessened his regret at leaving New Mexico.

Hester wrote frequently. She was very happy in Vermont; Virginia was kind to her, and the home overlooking placid Lake Champlain was comfortable. She had bought a new dress, because Virginia was quite gay, in prospect of her wedding. There were luncheons and dinners, and when Mr. Beetham came, and Gray, there would be a rush of festivities. Virginia's trousseau consisted chiefly of rough sports-clothes, suitable for Africa and its great spaces.

Another letter told of her visit to Bell Inn, and how she spent Thanksgiving with the Dodds, an old-fashioned Thanksgiving. In the morning they all went to church in the white building, with its small tower, white paint, and green shutters. It had snowed; everything, the elms, the houses, Bell Inn, was loaded with snow. It was very beautiful.

Hester wrote a good deal about John Dodd, who went to his office in Burlington every day. The firm with which he was associated had offered him a junior partnership. They were linked up in some way with Paul Fitz-Maurice's business in New York. There was some prospect that John would be sent over to study European engineering. He was making a name for himself, and his father and mother were very proud.

Hester wondered whether Cousin Leonard wouldn't do better to come direct to Burlington rather than try to get a job in New York. Mr. Lawrence had held out the idea that there might be something for a man of his type to do in the bank.

And she had found an opening, a very humble one, but she would soon learn because there was a Library training course in the University, in the Public Library. Not big pay, but it would help. Burlington was very attractive, and it was only a short distance from Bell Inn. She was sure that he would like Mr. and Mrs. Dodd—and John, too,—they were good as gold, and just his kind.

Young John was very happy in his decision to return to Burlington and gratify his father and mother.

There was a great deal about 'young John.' Mr. Euwer smiled a bit sadly as he read. Some time he supposed that Hester would have a home of her own. He must think over this Burlington matter. With Lawrence as his friend it gave him a backing. At his age it would be hard to make a start in New York. Hester would be happy. And he must see young John.

Mr. Euwer glanced out of the window of his little study and saw Jacques Dufour mounting Hester's horse, Star. José held the bridle and smiled all over his dirty face when Jacques threw him a dime. José's face was always dirty in spite of all Wong's scoldings.

Mr. Euwer wondered how Hester felt toward Jacques. She asked about him, and sent pleasant little messages. There had been something between those two, he did not know exactly what. He would not force confidences from Hester, but he was sure that something had troubled her sorely, she had grown so thin and pale.

'I'm glad that young John is there,' thought Cousin Leonard, 'to take her attention.'

Mr. Euwer was reading in the living-room, when he heard the

rattle of a car coming up the avenue shaded by pepper-trees.

'That sounds like the Sheriff's machine. What brings him here at this time of night?' queried Mr. Euwer.

He threw open one of the long windows opening on the veranda and faced Josiah, the Sheriff's assistant.

'Brought ye this telegram, Mr. Euwer. Sheriff thought you ort to hev' it to-night.'

Josiah's keen eyes were alive with curiosity. The Sheriff had read the message, by virtue of his office, and Josiah was thrilled. Mr. Euwer read it twice before he comprehended its importance.

LONDON, 12/11/1927.

Sir Hugh Euwer dead. You are heir. Come at once.

(Signed) LOCKHART, GUMMIDGE, and LOCKHART,
'Attorneys.

'Thank you very much, Josiah.' Mr. Euwer put his hand into his pocket.

Josiah drew back hastily.

'What did he say?' asked the Sheriff when Josiah returned.

'Nothin'. Didn't seem a bit excited,' said Josiah glumly.

'Guess you needn't ha' got so stirred up.'

The whole matter had been like a romance to Hester. Cousin Leonard sent her this message.

'Meet me New York the twenty-first. Sailing for England on *Leviathan*, and you are to go with me. Better arrange to stay with Constance, and be sure to get a good outfit of clothes. Have written Paul Fitz-Maurice to supply you with all funds necessary. No time for letter. Our cousin, Sir Hugh, is dead. Son passed away last year, so says letter from lawyers. Was ignorant of this. They had difficulty to find me. No communication with Sir Hugh lately. Euwer Manor and all the perquisites of title are ours. (He said "ours," dear Cousin Leonard! commented the amazed Hester.) Be sure to get plenty of pretty things. We must live up to our title.'

(Signed) LEONARD EUWER.'

This remarkable message had arrived just before Virginia's

marriage to the Honourable George Beetham. Hester was to be one of the bridesmaids, and was already arrayed in a gown of heavenly blue georgette. A big bouquet of delphiniums was on the table. In a moment the procession would descend the curving stairs to the hall for the ceremony.

John Dodd and Gray were among the ushers, John an inch taller than Gray; they preceded them downstairs, while Hester's brain whirled with the startling news. She wanted to tell Jack at once, for now there need be no delay in their marriage, of course, Cousin Leonard would see to that. He had plenty now.

As she stood beside Virginia while the clergyman spoke solemn words, the vastness of the change gradually percolated her mind. No more job in New York—Paul Fitz-Maurice had promised her one; no more shabby suits or anxiety for Cousin Leonard no longer young.

Mr. Beetham, dignified as ever, monocle firmly set, placed the ring on Virginia's finger and looked down at her with genuine pride and affection. Virginia met his glance, and smiled. She loved her archaeologist, and wanted to travel to the wilds of Africa or anywhere else, if George went along.

Little did Hester think that the idyllic days at Burlington in Virginia's porch or on the waters of Lake Champlain, drifting in a row-boat in the moonlight, at Bell Inn, dear Bell Inn, always with John by her side, were over, that her romance was to be wrecked by this night-letter from Cousin Leonard.

Hester had realized at once when Jack came to greet her at Burlington that he had held her love ever since the days when she rang the dinner-bell for the men to come in from the harvest-field, and Jack—tall and fair as a Viking—had smiled at her as he went by. And John knew all this, too, so it took a very short time for things to come to a climax. It was all planned out. She would work, and he would, too, and some day, it might be a good while, they would make a home for Cousin Leonard in Burlington. Or maybe, they could live at

Bell Inn. Hester and Jane Dodd were like mother and daughter now. Even the proprietor of Bell Inn was pleased.

She told John about Jacques Dufour and his strange, impelling attraction for her.

'Suppose,' she said anxiously, 'that after we are married Jacques should come and play his violin as he did at the trout-pool or in the studio at La Palomba, and it should create in me that sort of madness, so uncontrollable, so that I followed him away from you.'

John laughed at first. Then became grave.

'I don't understand such things, Hester, I'm not the temperamental kind, but I should hold you and protect you with my love. It might be stronger than Jacques' influence. Jacques isn't bad, he really isn't. But he is a remarkable genius.'

'He says he's got a devil in him.'

'Maybe we all have some kind of an evil spirit in us, always fighting the good. I've been thinking over these things a good deal, Hester. It must be possible to dominate the evil with the good. That is—I'm no preacher, don't know how to say it—if God lives in us, there isn't any place for the devil.'

'You mean, Jack, that if I was filled with the spirit of God, I need not fear any outside influence.'

'Just that, Hester.'

And so that matter ended.

Cousin Leonard's message had made much trouble. John Dodd, instead of rejoicing, balked like one of his father's mules. He'd have nothing to do with Sir Leonard Euwer's money. This put a new light on everything. He was no fortune-seeker. Until he could come to her with a sufficient amount of income so that he could maintain her as a baronet's close relative, practically a daughter, should be maintained, they must consider each other free from any engagement.

If in the interval she found anybody she liked better, Gray Lawrence, or Jacques—she seemed to have a feeling for him—

John Dodd's excitement and pride made him bitter and cruel—she was free.

Virginia had left with her husband in a shower of rice. Hester, lovely in her bridesmaid's dress, fingered the delphiniums lying on her lap. Her cheeks were flaming. So this was the way he took her good fortune, which she had thought would increase their happiness! Very well.

'I suppose you'd be free, also,' she said, harshly.

'Why, of course. You see, Hester, the whole situation is changed by this.'

'I don't see it at all,' she began. No, she would not insist on any one marrying her if he didn't want to.

So they parted as lovers sometimes do, full of pride and anger, but with hearts warm with unspoken love.

Hester left Burlington for New York, writing a cordial note to Mrs. Dodd, explaining that she did not have time to come to Bell Inn. Jane Dodd was much upset by this note, and appealed to her husband.

'You let 'em alone, Jane. You can't force things. She an' John have had some fuss,' said wise old John Dodd.

Shopping in New York was entrancing; the beautiful garments, gifts from Cousin Leonard, topped off by a string of pearls, as costly as those worn by Constance, bought by Sir Leonard the day before they sailed, diverted her, but she did not forget.

The great *Leviathan* lay in the dock at New York, steam up, flags flying. It was nearing midnight, late in December, and bitterly cold. One of those marvellous ice-storms which occasionally visit the Atlantic coast had turned Manhattan Island into fairyland.

The lights of the ocean monster shone on huge icicles depending from the roofs of the dock-house; its funnels and bulwarks reflected rainbow colours from an icy coating. The vessel would sail at one minute after the clock struck twelve,

and already warnings were sounded. The crowds of merry-makers in the saloon and on gangways and decks were bidding farewell to friends.

Constance Fitz-Maurice pushed her way through to Hester.

'Good-bye, you darling! We'll see you in England in June, Sir Leonard.'

'You must make us a long visit, Mrs. Fitz-Maurice,' Leonard Euwer urged.

His title was obnoxious to him. 'I am no different now,' he protested. 'I would shirk this whole business if it were not a family matter, you know. One has a duty toward one's birthplace and forbears. Remember, I am an adopted son of these great United States, and as soon as I can I shall return to Pepper Tree Ranch if I can persuade Beetham to sell it to me.'

'We'll come if we may bring Baby,' Constance answered from the depths of her sable coat. A delicate white orchid was pinned upon it—an orchid in icy, zero weather!

'There's a big nursery.'

Paul Fitz-Maurice passed, and Gray Lawrence held Hester's hand a long moment.

'May I wish you happiness, Hester?'

'Not yet, Gray.' Gray was puzzled, but dared not ask questions. He had thought—

'Then maybe there's a chance for me?'

His tone was light, but his eyes were very earnest.

It was a strange place for such words so full of meaning, as they stood in the midst of a crowd pressing toward the gang-plank. Pungent perfumes arose, the warmth of human bodies, the tinkle of women's voices.

'Is there, Hester?'

'I'm sorry, Gray——'

He seized both her hands.

'Good-bye, Hester,' Gray said, then hurried away.

Slowly the *Leviathan* moved along the pier while the bands played and the crowds waved and cheered. Leaning over the rail, Hester and Cousin Leonard saw Constance and Paul. Gray joined them. Handkerchiefs waved, faces on the pier illuminated by arc-lights grew faint, then disappeared.

The ship, guided by tiny tug-boats, headed toward the Statue of Liberty. Cousin Leonard left her, and Hester remained, looking at the wonderful sky-line of New York, majestic in the winter night beneath a blue-black sky pointed with golden stars. Cathedrals, palaces, towers, some of them masses of light, even at midnight; thousands of men and women were cleaning these huge buildings, preparing for the business of the next day.

John had not come to see her sail, and there was no message from him.

Hester went, finally, to the suite of rooms which she and her cousin were to occupy on the voyage; a dainty *salon*, its panels painted with exquisite pictures, two spacious cabins, provided with every luxury, two bath-rooms. She would not have been human if her heart had not leaped with delight at this new and surprising change in her life. Lights gleamed, softly shaded with pink. In the *salon* were roses, long-stemmed red roses, carnations, lilacs, even lilies-of-the-valley—these bore Constance's name. Surely, in New York all things are possible, marvelled Hester. Spring in December, when the city was imprisoned in ice. There was a basket of fruit, grapes, oranges, strange prickly fruit which she did not know, from Paul. With eager fingers she opened the packages lying on the table. White and purple orchids from Gray, he had been a splendid 'pal.' There was nothing from John Dodd.

Cousin Leonard entered, his face shining with pleasure.

'Hester,' he said eagerly, 'there is just one thing connected with this sudden change in our fortunes and it is that I can now give you all these comforts. My dear! You are crying. Doesn't this make you happy, my child?'

She put her arms around his neck and looked into his honest, true eyes.

'No one in this world could have done for me what you have, you dearest man! But I was just as happy with you at Pepper Tree Ranch as I ever shall be at Euwer Manor. I've learned one lesson, Cousin Leonard. It isn't what you *have* that brings happiness.'

He kissed her tenderly, patted her shoulder, and sent her to bed. For a long time the little man sat on the gilt and damask couch. He shook his head several times and roughed up his fringe of grey hair encircling the bald spot.

'Something has gone wrong,' he mused, sadly. 'I wonder what.'

Cousin Leonard's mind would have been slightly relieved could he have seen Hester's glowing face. At this moment she discovered a telegram. It was from young John Dodd, and it read thus:

'Look for me next Christmas. Have decided that titles and manors, even gold, shall not stand between us if you love me. Bon voyage. Faithfully, John.'

It was sent from Burlington, Vermont. With the precious message in her grasp Hester lay down on the couch to think it all over. It was now half-past one in the morning, but she was not calm enough to go to bed. The ship was already out of sight of land, speeding toward England, bearing her into new and very strange surroundings. She read the message again.

'Look for me next Christmas. (A whole year!) Have decided that titles and manors, even gold, shall not separate us if you love me. Bon voyage. Faithfully, John.'

Very early the next morning Hester radioed to John Dodd Junior, Bell Inn, Stanton, Vermont, one single word, 'Come.'

XXIII

AT EUWER MANOR

THE grass lay still green around Euwer Manor, a stately though sprawling mass of masonry, long, low buildings, old turrets hidden beneath a load of wooden ivy, the growth of centuries, in whose branches birds nested and raised their young.

Many windows were set into the thick brick walls of this home of Hester's ancestors, like eyes opening on forest, dale and stream in the heart of Devonshire. Broad lawns, smooth as velvet, gardens, drive-ways edged with rare shrubs, acres of ground with a farmhouse and dairies; in the meadows plump black and white cows lazily grazed, doves made their homes under the overhanging roof of the farm-house, cooing softly in the warm, moist air.

It was two days before Christmas, but no sign of snow. A faint bluish haze mysteriously veiled the houses in the neighbouring village, and the spire of a grey stone church; on one side of the church was a grave-yard with moss-covered inscriptions. In the vaults lay buried dead and gone Euwers.

John and Hester had wandered into the church that morning, had stood beside the recumbent marble figure of Hugh Euwer, Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, and Leonard Euwer, 1614-1682, and the last tablets dedicated to Sir Hugh and his two sons, through whose death, and that of Major Hugh Euwer, Hester's father, Sir Leonard Euwer now assumed the dignity of Lord of the Manor. He was the last male Euwer. After him, the title, lands and countless securities lying in London banks would pass to a distant relative bearing another name.

Now, the men were bringing in the huge Yule log, according to immemorial custom, with shouts and song.

Hester went out to meet them. John Dodd might have been a descendant of one of the Norsemen who came long ago to England; blonde, muscular, with steel-blue eyes and fair, waving hair. Paul Fitz-Maurice was with him, Constance was in the nursery where generations of Euwer babies had slept. The Fitz-Maurices had brought the stiffly-starched nurse and laughing baby-girl, who ran about and talked now.

‘Isn’t this great?’ John called as he went by.

Into the immense hall they dragged the Yule log, placing it in the fireplace under a carved wooden mantel reaching to the ceiling.

John came and stood beside Hester. Over their heads hung a time-darkened portrait of a Sir Guy Euwer who had fought in the Wars of the Roses.

‘Sometimes I have to pinch myself to be sure that I’m not dreaming, Jack.’

‘It is kind of a fairy-tale, isn’t it? You’ve got everything ready, Hester. Paul says that we must leave right after Christmas. There’s another part of the fairy-tale, that I should get this chance to join with their firm and we can travel all over Europe. And a good salary, too. You won’t mind, Hester, going back to quiet Bell Inn after this?’

She smiled and slipped her hand into his.

‘Oh, I have a letter from father; just came. He says that he and mother are well—here’s a note for you, dear—and he has bought from Jacques the Dufour place, had the deed made out in my name. It’s their wedding present to us.’

‘How good of them!’

After that she was silent so long that John turned to study her face. He had tried to ignore what she had told him about her peculiar relationship with Jacques—it had been imagination, he assured himself—but it gave him an uneasy feeling, it was

something that mystified and troubled him, as intangible matters always did. Young John, like his father, was essentially practical.

'I wonder where Jacques is,' he said, watching her. 'Father must know.'

'Cousin Leonard told me that he intended to go to France. Probably that is why he sold the house.'

'You're not—not afraid of him now, are you, my darling?'

'I—don't know, Jack. I wish sometimes that I might see him again, so that I might be sure. Cousin Leonard says that Jacques is changed, completely changed since the accident.'

'That's hard to believe. Don't think of it any more. You won't object, Hester, to living in the old Dufour house?'

She threw off her momentary gloom.

'I'll love it, Jack.'

About nine o'clock on the morning of Christmas Eve in the Year of our Lord, 1928, a little procession came forth from the wide entrance to Euwer Manor, wound its way across the lawn, down through the woods, and out of a narrow iron gateway to the old stone church.

Hester and John Dodd, Sir Leonard and the American Ambassador from London, Constance and her husband, the nurse and the baby.

Up the worn pavement to the altar they went, and while the members of the Euwer household and the villagers crowded into the rear of the ancient building, Hester and John were married.

'Did you ever see anything more lovely, Paul, than Hetty was in that simple chiffon dress with the pearls around her neck and only the orange-blossoms that Jack brought her from Florida to decorate her bright hair?' Constance said when they were all back at the Manor. 'No point-lace, no long draperies, no veil! Just the sweetest, simplest wedding I ever attended.'

'Nice girl, Hester, and fine old chap, Sir Leonard,' Paul

disposed of this matter briefly. ‘Now, Constance, we’d better leave as soon as luncheon is over. The Ambassador is going on that one-something train. Everything was done according to our laws, and I was glad to see our flag over the door of the church.’

‘Hester and John will spend Christmas here?’

‘Yes. Then they’ll join us in London, and we’ll start for Paris.’

After a quiet Christmas Day, a beautiful service in the old church at sunrise, an evening spent with Cousin Leonard by the blazing Yule log, and with the echo of carols in their memories, Hester and her husband went up to London to one of those great hostellries famous the world over.

‘Paul and Constance are dining out with friends, Hester. Suppose we go to a show, or something. The porter can get us tickets to a concert at the Criterion. Want to go?’

‘Certainly, Jack.’

Was ever a girl happier or more fortunate? thought Hester, awaiting his return.

It began to snow as they went out into brilliantly-lighted streets, but in the taxi it was warm and sheltered. The Criterion proved to be a large hall seating about two thousand persons. The members of the orchestra were coming in, instruments were twanging inharmoniously.

Hester had not opened her programme. She was so content, so happy with John beside her, that outside things counted little.

She heard a woman say, ‘People are crazy about him. They say that he is the greatest violinist we have.’

‘Strange that he invariably introduces into every programme that latest composition of his, “The Winds of God.”’

‘Yes, he’s played it everywhere in Europe, even in Russia, where he made a great name.’

Who could this remarkable artist be?

Hester opened her programme, and for an instant her heart seemed to stop beating.

'Violinist: Jacques Dufour.'

She glanced over the pieces to be played, the Overture to *Tannhäuser*, a Symphony by Brahms, then, 'The Winds of God,' a Lyric composition by Mr. Dufour.

'Hello,' said Jack, looking up from the evening paper, 'Jacques Dufour's going to play. To think that we should have happened on him here in London!' His voice was deceptively cheerful. He stole a glance at Hester's pale face, and said things in his mind about the porter who had innocently recommended this concert. 'The Winds of God.' 'What the _____,

The orchestra began to play. People scowled at Jack. He sat back and frowned at the programme.

Why did Jacques have to turn up now, just as their married life was beginning, and mix things all up? How was Hester going to take the music? He wished that he could get her out of this before Jacques came on the stage. The fellow had never had the grace to send her a single word of apology for leading her into the airplane accident; she might have been killed, too. Jacques always was queer, you never could tell what he would do. John's whole body grew tense. Well, might as well get it over, it had to be.

Jacques stood waiting for the orchestra to play the prelude. He held his instrument to his ear, tuning it. His eyes wandered over the audience. The porter had done his duty bravely in securing two good seats in the centre, fifth row. It was inevitable that he should see Hester and John.

Raising the violin to his shoulder, Jacques began to play the composition which he had begun under the stress of deep emotion as he sat upon the cliff in New Mexico and saw the wonders of God's creation spread out before him.

God in the whirlwind, the clashing, roaring, mighty whirlwind

sweeping in fury over the earth. The *motif*, a graceful, harmonious melody, wove in and out of the discord and wrath of the whirlwind—a *motif* of love. The music changed. There came the wailing of lost souls, the crying of sufferers, the groans of the dying, and through them, the sighing of winds carrying that impelling, moving melody of God's love for His creatures. Gently the wind blew in cadences, in swift vibrations of the strings, circling over a garden in which sat a young girl, Mary by name. Tall lilies with golden hearts bloomed around her, and the Spirit of God encompassed her, as with uplifted eyes she gazed toward Heaven.

The melody hovered over Bethlehem, over the manger where lay the Child; soft zephyrs touched the Child's cheeks and played over His tiny body.

'Thou shalt call His Name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins.'

The breeze passed gently over Palestine as the Man Divine healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out devils. Ever was repeated the exquisite *motif* of love, compelling, purifying, sanctifying, the 'Winds of God' sweeping over the world. They came rushing mightily, and again there was the roaring of the whirlwind, but not now in wrath. It caught up the Man Divine bearing Him into the clouds.

Men and women held their breath as they listened, enthralled. They saw not Jacques drawing his bow over responsive strings, he, the human instrument, was forgotten in the Message which he brought through the 'Winds of God.'

Hester put her hand in John's. He held it tightly. Her heart was singing with the angels. She—and Jacques, too—had learned the Truth and Christ had set them free—free!

Increasing in volume arose the melody, so sweet and clear, which had woven through the music as a thread of pure gold is run among the design of a tapestry. Louder and louder it swelled, accompanied by the continued sighing of wind. Above

the sound of the harp and cymbals the piercing notes of the violin dominated.

' And there were great voices in heaven saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.'

While applause reverberated around him, Jacques looked down at Hester. In his glance was an appeal for forgiveness. She answered with a nod and smile.

He moved his hand in a gesture of farewell and, bowing to the audience, retired. In spite of prolonged clapping, Jacques refused to come out again.

' Wasn't that wonderful?' said the woman behind Hester.
' He makes you see it all, has a strange power.'

' I think he has a message to deliver,' replied her friend.
' Perhaps a new prophet has arisen who speaks through music and not the voice.'

When Hester and John sought for Jacques they could not find him, either behind the stage or at his hotel.

' Mr. Dufour has already left,' they were told.

Occasionally, after Hester and John were settled in the home near Bell Inn, the old ' Dufour Place,' news came of Jacques. A missionary reported that he had heard him play in the wilds of Thibet where the wretched natives seemed to catch his message in some mysterious way; travellers returning from the Orient had listened to ' The Winds of God ' in Pekin, in Calcutta, in Rangoon, in Leningrad and Paris.

When Virginia and Mr. Beetham came home from Africa they said that they heard Jacques play in Cairo, and he dined with them. He was creating a furore everywhere, especially when he played the ' Winds of God.'

But not yet has Jacques Dufour returned to the place of his birth in the quiet hills of Northern Vermont,

